

THE GREAT SCOUT'S REMARKABLE SEARCH!

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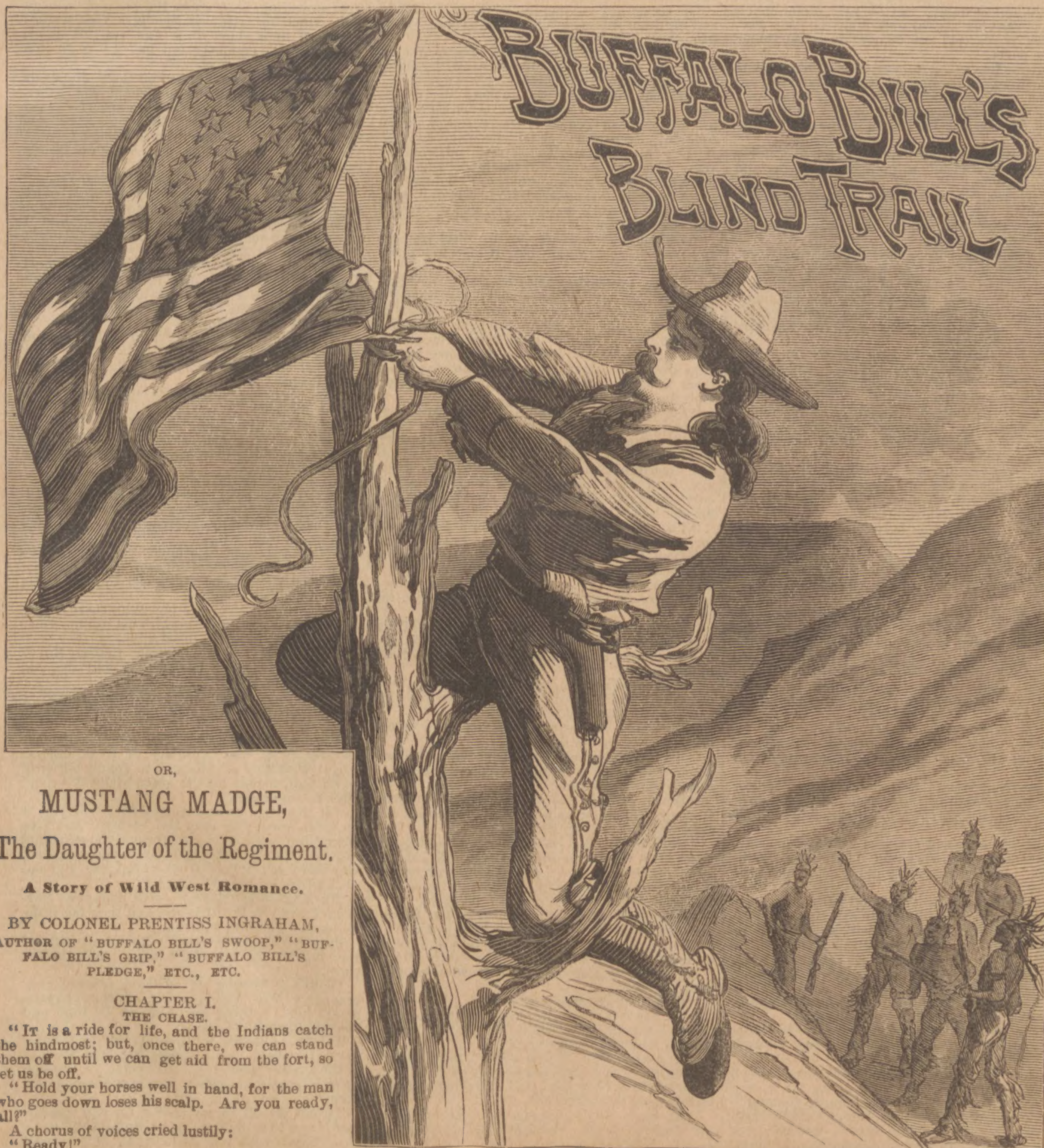
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BUFFALO BILL'S BLIND TRAIL

OR,
MUSTANG MADGE,
The Daughter of the Regiment.

A Story of Wild West Romance.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S SWOOP," "BUFFALO
BILL'S GRIP," "BUFFALO BILL'S
PLEDGE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE CHASE.

"It is a ride for life, and the Indians catch the hindmost; but, once there, we can stand them off until we can get aid from the fort, so let us be off."

"Hold your horses well in hand, for the man who goes down loses his scalp. Are you ready, all?"

A chorus of voices cried lustily:

"Ready!"

"Then follow me."

BUFFALO BILL MADE THE FLAG SIGNAL FAST UPON THE LIGHTNING-RIVEN TOP OF THE TREE.

With the words the speaker touched the flanks of his horse with his spurs and the animal bounded away at a run, while following him came a party of thirty or more horsemen and half a dozen pack-animals.

The man whose words open this story was Buffalo Bill, now truly of world-wide fame, though but a few years ago he was only a frontier scout and guide.

Known almost to every one by sight, there is little need to describe him more than to say that he was six feet tall, somewhat spare in form, straight as an arrow and as handsome as an Adonis.

He was dressed in buckskin, fringed and beaded, wore top cavalry boots, and a gray sombrero of broadest brim and encircled by a silver cord or miniature lariat, while in front of his hat was a solid gold buffalo with diamond eyes.

He had a repeating rifle slung at his back, a pair of revolvers in his belt, with a carved-handle hunting-knife, and was well-mounted and equipped for a long trail.

Those who followed him were a party of troopers, headed by two officers, one wearing the shoulder-straps of a captain, the other of a second lieutenant.

There rode between the first and second squads of cavalrymen two men of distinguished bearing, and whose appearance indicated that they were English.

They were dressed in handsome hunting suits, rode well and were armed with rifles and revolvers.

Between the second and third squads came a couple of negroes, followed by half a dozen pack-horses, and bringing up the rear alone was a man of striking appearance, and who, as a borderman is scarcely less famous than the leader of the party.

He rode like a Texan, was dressed in a fatigue uniform, excepting that he wore a sombrero, encircled by a gold cord, while his hat was looped up on one side with a beaver carved skillfully in ivory, in token of his Indian name of "White Beaver."

The horseman's face was one to see and never forget, for it was full of intelligence, daring and determination.

In the army he was known as Surgeon Frank Powell, of the cavalry, while he also bore the names of the "Surgeon Scout," "Fancy Frank" and "White Beaver."

He rode along with a face perfectly unmoved, though hot upon the trail of the party came, at a run, a band of a couple of hundred Indians.

"A little faster, Bill, for they are gaining," he called out to Buffalo Bill, as a glance over his shoulder revealed the fact that the red-skins were gaining ground.

"It's a rough trail to push harder over, doctor," called back Cody, who was picking the way as best he could over the rugged way, and up and down valley and hill.

"All right; take no chances, but go as you think best," was the answer, and the Surgeon Scout's eyes fell upon a ridge ahead over which the party must soon go.

His look backward revealed the Indians stretched out over a mile in length, and urging their horses with all speed to come up with the band whose scalps they coveted.

"There are all of two hundred of them, outnumbering us six to one, so we dare not halt for a fight where we can get no advantage.

"But they are gaining, and I will see if I can check them at the ridge, if only for a few minutes."

So saying he unslung his silver-mounted repeating-rifle, and as the party went over the ridge he halted when just out of sight of the pursuing Indians, took position behind a boulder, and calmly awaited their approach.

Those ahead did not notice his absence until they heard, ringing out in rapid succession, the shots from his repeating-rifle.

Until sixteen had been counted he did not remove his finger from the trigger, and then as the smoke lifted he gazed down the trail at the result.

"As I expected," he said, grimly, as he saw the Indians falling back to cover, and out of range, the head of the column deploying into a line.

But the shots had not been all thrown away, as here and there a warrior had fallen from his saddle, killed or wounded, and a horse had gone down.

Quickly the party ahead had halted, until the warning voice of Buffalo Bill was heard:

"Come on! Surgeon Powell knows what he is about, and the delay will aid us greatly!"

"But the brave surgeon remains alone, while we ride on, Scout Cody," cried Lord Lucien Lonsfield, still drawing rein.

"Yes, we must not desert him," said Captain Sir John Reeder, the other Englishman.

"Powell is all right, gentlemen, and is aiding our escape by a trick which will check the red-skins for a few minutes.

"They will soon see that we have not all halted, and Powell will overtake us, for he is a daring rider, no matter how rugged the trail," answered Captain Alfred Taylor, of the Fifth Cavalry, a tall, dashing officer, who had won fame as an Indian-fighter, explaining the situa-

tion to the two English officers, who were his guests on the expedition, for Lord Lonsfield was commander of the Royal British Hussars, and Sir John was a captain in a regiment of dragoons.

And on the party swept, led by Buffalo Bill, still faster than before, while glancing backward they saw Surgeon Powell still standing at bay on the ridge, and raising his rifle to his shoulder, to open fire again upon the red-skins.

CHAPTER II.

A LOST HEIR.

SOME weeks prior to the flight for life of the party led by Buffalo Bill, there came to Fort Beauvoir one of the advanced military posts, two English gentlemen, under the escort of a guide and several Pawnee Indians.

The gentlemen brought letters of introduction from the general of the army to Colonel Loyal, commandant of the post, making known the fact that Colonel Lord Lucien Lonsfield and Captain Sir John Reeder were English officers, who had come to America upon a mission of great importance to themselves, and asking the commander of the post to extend to them every aid and courtesy within his power in carrying out their purpose.

The two English officers at once found in Colonel Loyal a friend ready to do all he could to assist them, while in the Englishmen he discovered men who had won fame in India and in Africa, and though holding rank and title, were brave, unassuming, and just the ones to win regard and admiration with all with whom they came in contact.

The reason for the coming of Lord Lonsfield and Sir John was soon told to the colonel by the former, who had said:

"We are here, Colonel Loyal, in search of a lost heir, a kinsman of mine and of Sir John, who disappeared from England years ago.

"He had a quarrel with my elder brother in early manhood, and years after, when both were in the army in India, it was renewed, a duel followed, and my brother fell seriously wounded.

"Our kinsman left India, resigned from the army, and returning to England, remained there until news came of my brother's death.

"At once he disappeared from England, and, as we have heard, went to sea, and afterward came to America.

"We have traced him to the West, and we are now searching for him, if alive, or proof that he is dead.

"By my brother's death I became Lord Lonsfield, and if our lost kinsman is dead, then Sir John here is the heir to the title and estates of Vancourt, while, if alive, Granger Goldhurst is Lord Vancourt, for though when he disappeared there were no less than five heirs to the title, death has since played sad havoc among them, and he is the heir, if living, and if dead, then Sir John is.

"For my part, Granger Goldhurst and myself were like brothers, and I happen to know that my own brother was wrong in the quarrel, and brought his death upon himself by a persistent determination to force Goldhurst to meet him in a duel, for they were rivals for a fair lady's hand, and who wedded my brother upon his death-bed.

"I am more than anxious to find Goldhurst, for he has saved my life on two occasions, and if he is not dead, I desire him to secure his rights of title and estate, while if he has passed away, then I am equally as desirous to see my friend and kinsman here, Sir John Reeder, get his own.

"Now, Colonel Loyal, you understand fully what has brought us to the American frontier, and I am glad that we can rely upon your aid in the matter."

"You certainly can, my lord, for all of us here at the fort will do all in our power to find this lost heir you speak of.

"But may I ask what clues you have of his being here upon the border?"

Lord Lonsfield took from his pocket a leather wallet containing a number of papers, some of them yellowed by time.

"Here, Colonel Loyal, is a statement that Granger Goldhurst sailed from London on the brig Witch, bound to Brazil.

"Here is another statement that he became mate of a vessel running between Rio Janeiro and New Orleans, and a year after was wrecked in the West Indies, but was picked up by a vessel bound to New York, and carried there.

"From that city we traced him west to Chicago, then to Council Bluffs, and to the mines of Colorado, which he left several years ago to go upon a lone trail, he said, into the Rocky Mountains, and was last seen in the country about your post."

"How long ago was this, sir?"

"He was last seen by a man who had been his companion, and from whom we got our information, some five years ago."

"And what style of man was he, may I ask?"

"Six feet in height, possessing a splendid physique, dark-brown hair, and hazel eyes, large and dreamy in expression.

"He was a very handsome man, and when he left England nearly nineteen years ago, was just twenty-five years of age.

"He always went under his own name, and hence our attorneys were able to trace him to this frontier, when the detective sent over by them on the mission was killed in a saloon row in Denver, and so Sir John and I decided to pick up the trail where his death ended it, and hence came to the United States to prosecute the search, and now appeal to you for the help which your general said you would kindly extend."

"Personally I can do but little, my lord, but I can present to you a man who can find your lost kinsman, if any one can do so," and calling to his orderly Colonel Loyal told him to request Buffalo Bill to at once come to headquarters.

CHAPTER III.

A BLIND TRAIL.

WHEN Colonel Loyal spoke of Buffalo Bill, Lord Lonsfield at once said:

"Yes; he is the one whom many have told us to seek as our guide.

"Why, may I ask, sir, has he such a strange name?"

"Well, he has twice proven his claim to the prefix *Buffalo*, while his name is William Cody.

"Once, when a boy, he climbed a lone tree in the prairie to escape a herd of buffaloes, and discovered from his perch that they were being chased by a band of Indians, and at once he decided to escape by using a buffalo as a horse, for the red-skins had by far the greatest terror for him.

"He watched his chance and dropped from a low spreading limb upon the back of a huge bull, which in fright at having a rider, headed the herd in a short while and ran off alone, going near the camp the boy had left to go on a hunt.

"He was at once dubbed by the trainmen as Buffalo Billy, a name which which was shortened to Buffalo Bill when in one season he killed nearly five thousand of the animals he was named after, when employed to furnish food on the hoof for the workers on the Kansas Pacific railroad."

"A remarkable man indeed, Colonel Loyal."

"Yes, and one who has become still more noted as a scout, Indian-fighter and guide, for he is the best plainsman on the border, and if any man can successfully serve you, gentlemen, Buffalo Bill is that man."

"You give us full confidence in him, Colonel Loyal; but we have also heard of one other whom we were told to seek advice from, as a man who knew the frontier its length."

"May I ask his name?"

"Our informant spoke of him as the Surgeon Scout."

"Yes, as Doctor Frank Powell," added Sir John Reeder.

"Ah, yes, the surgeon of the fort, Doctor Frank Powell."

"He is here also then, colonel?"

"Yes, and you shall meet him, for Surgeon Powell is indeed a man to seek advice of in your case, gentlemen."

"A surgeon at the fort, and also a scout?"

"Well, he is both, for he has a love of adventure which sends him often on the trail, and his life has been a strange romance, one tinged with sorrows as well as joys.

"He is a splendid specimen of a man, brave as a lion, a skillful trailer, a dead shot and one whom it would be dangerous to have a foe, though he is an open one.

"A better surgeon and physician there is not in the army, though I am sure he would rather fight red-skins than visit patients.

"If at a loss in his trailing, Buffalo Bill is sure to seek Surgeon Powell's aid, and the two are boon comrades."

"Two men I am most anxious indeed to meet," Lord Lonsfield said, while Sir John remarked:

"Yes, as I am, and I feel more confidence already, from what you say of them, Colonel Loyal, that they are the men to follow our trail to the end, though how to start about it we can offer no suggestion."

"If there is a trace of a trail they will pick it up, gentlemen, you may feel assured; but here comes Buffalo Bill now, and the one you see riding into the fort at yonder gate, is Surgeon Powell, who has just returned from a hunt, for you see his horse is loaded with game."

The Englishmen gave a quick glance at Surgeon Powell in the distance, and then faced the scout who just then entered.

They were at once struck with admiration at the handsome, splendid-looking man before them.

Though possessing an off-hand, free and easy manner, there was nothing of the bravado about him, nothing but respect in tone and bearing toward his colonel.

"Cody, I desire to present you to Colonel Lord Lonsfield and Captain Sir John Reeder, of the British Army, who have come to America upon a matter in which you may perhaps aid them."

"I will do all in my power for you, gentlemen," was the frank reply of Buffalo Bill as he shook hands with the two British officers who

were at once won over to liking him and placing confidence in him.

"I sent for you, Cody, that you might hear Lonsfield's story, so be seated and he will make it known to you."

The scout bowed and took the proffered seat, while Lord Lonsfield, in a more explicit manner than before told the story of the lost kinsman, leaving out no detail that might be of use to the scout.

"Well, Cody, what do you think of it?" asked Colonel Loyal when the scout had heard all.

"It is a blind trail, sir," was the prompt response.

"May I ask what a blind trail means?" Sir John Reeder asked.

"A trail one can see nothing of, no end to, sir, and must follow it blindly," answered Buffalo Bill.

"But you do not refuse to try and follow it?" eagerly asked Lord Lonsfield.

"Oh, no, sir, with the colonel's permission, but I can promise no more than to try and pick it up and find the end."

"And we can ask no more," said Sir John, just as Doctor Frank Powell entered the colonel's quarters with the remark:

"I have brought you more game, colonel—ah! pardon me, for I did not know that you had guests."

The surgeon scout was at once presented to the strangers, and he too won their admiration at first glance.

After a short conversation the matter was brought up of why they had come, and at the colonel's request Lord Lonsfield again repeated his story, ending with the question:

"And now, Surgeon Powell, what do you think?"

"It is a blind trail, sir, one to follow as in the dark," was the quick response of Surgeon Powell, and the two Englishmen looked at each other in amazement that each of the two noted frontiersmen should have so promptly expressed the same opinion.

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE AT FORT BEAUVOIR.

AFTER a long conversation with Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, in the presence of Colonel Loyal, the two English officers decided to be governed by those in whose hands they placed the carrying out of their plans to discover the lost heir, dead or alive.

The plan decided upon was that the reason for the coming of the Englishmen was to be kept secret, and Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell were to start out to discover the blind trail.

In the mean while the visitors should remain the guests of Colonel Loyal, having come presumably for a hunt on the border, and to see frontier life as it was.

If any discovery was made by the scouts, then Captain Alfred Taylor, one of the most popular and efficient officers of the fort, and withal a wild rider and great hunter, not to speak of his qualities as an Indian-fighter, was to command a small escort to go on the hunt for the lost heir, for a personal request from the commander-in-chief of the English Army to lend what aid possible to Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, and military courtesy required that it should be done.

Having decided upon this course the two English officers were at once given pleasant rooms in the colonel's quarters, and a round of pleasures was inaugurated for them during their stay.

Fort Beauvoir was a favorite fort with army officers and their families, and there was a large contingent there at the time of the coming of the Englishmen.

The officers' quarters were among the best on the frontier, and there was a social hall where large dinners, suppers and dances were given, the same being utilized on Sundays for church services, and it was often remarked that the liveliest officers in the dances were the most stupid ones in the church services, stealing the time of the sermon for "forty winks" to catch up sleep lost in moonlight love-making or poker playing at the club.

Captain Alfred Taylor and Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk, were among the gayest officers in leading off in all kinds of amusements, and the two Englishmen were taken under the immediate shadow of their wings during their stay, for both had been let into the real secret of their coming and the captain's troop was the one that was to be their escort.

Among the three score younger ladies at the fort, including married ladies, maidens who had left "sweet sixteen" some years behind them, and young girls who were entering their "teens" there was one who was an acknowledged belle.

She was known as the "Daughter of the Fifth," and from the colonel down to the last enlisted private soldier every man held a claim upon her as one of her many fathers.

Standing in the Social Hall several nights after their coming, chatting with Captain Taylor, and hearing that officer's comments upon the guests as they arrived for an evening's enjoyment, as to who they were, their ranks and foibles, Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder suddenly beheld a vision of loveliness sweep into

the room upon the arm of the chaplain, and with half a dozen young officers close upon her trail.

"Who is that beautiful girl, Captain Taylor?" quickly asked Lord Lonsfield.

"That is our daughter."

"I beg pardon."

"I mean that it is the 'Daughter of the Fifth' to which regiment of cavalry, I believe you know I belong?"

"Yes, and why named the *Daughter of the Fifth*, may I ask?"

"Is she not a beautiful girl?" Sir John Reeder said.

"I will introduce you soon, for not to know Mustang Madge is to be thyself unknown."

"But first tell us who this Mustang Madge, the Daughter of the Fifth is, Captain Taylor, that we may not grope in the dark regarding her, or as your scout Buffalo Bill expressed it, be on a blind trail."

"I will give you as much of her story as I can now, for you must know her, as a nobler, truer little woman does not live, north, south, east or west."

"She looks it."

"And acts it, my lord."

"What her name is, other than Madge, none of us know, for she does not remember, and the only thing that she could tell us of her past was that she was 'Baby Madge.'"

"In fact, the old soldiers of the regiment still call her Baby Madge, and resent the names of 'Mustang Madge' and 'Lady Madcap,' given her by the younger men."

"How old is she?"

"To all intents and purposes, as far as an estimate can be made, she is sixteen, and the Fifth have set a day each year to celebrate as her birthday anniversary."

"But who is this remarkable young lady, Captain Taylor?" asked Lord Lonsfield, with increased interest.

"Ah! there's the rub, for that is just what I do not know, nor is any one else better informed on the subject than myself."

"The truth is, my lord, the young lady is a mystery, is a girl with a history, young as she is, and we would all of us give a month's pay to find out all about her, provided it did not take her away from the Fifth, for that we would not allow, for she is our daughter collectively; and if she ever marries, she has got to wed one of her regimental fathers, for we'll shoot the man who makes love to her out of the regiment."

"And still we know nothing about her," laughed Sir John Reeder, while Captain Taylor said:

"That is so, for I have not told you her story; but I will."

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

SOCIAL HALL was a large log cabin, with two wings which served as cloak-rooms, and one in the rear which served the double purpose as kitchen and vestry-room.

There was a platform for church services on Sunday, and this was utilized as the place for the band when there was a ball, or a stage when a lecture, recitations or private theatricals were given.

At night, the rear room, which was the chaplain's robing-room on Sundays, was turned into a kitchen and pantry, and many a *bon vivant*, seeing the surplined parson emerge on the Sabbath, had drawn an unfavorable comparison between the good man and the *chef de cuisine* who would come forth by night with a waiter bending under salads, game and wines.

There was no nonsense about Chaplain Ben Burton, as his intimates called him, of the Fifth, and so long as he could get a place to preach in on the Sabbath Day he cared not for the follies that had been held there on week days.

He was a man of fine learning, an orator, preached a good sermon, and knew just when he was becoming a bore with a long discourse, while he was kind-hearted, hail-fellow-well-met with the garrison, and as good a man as ever wore a shoulder-strap.

In a fight he kept up with the procession, never winced under fire, and more than thrice had risked his life to bring a wounded comrade from the field in a retreat.

It was this man, "Reverend Ben, Gospel Sharp of the Fifth," as the boys irreverently called him, though no irreverence was meant, that came into the Social Hall with Mustang Madge upon his arm.

Behind them followed a handsome lady of thirty, upon the arm of Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk, and she was known as "Mrs. Ben," and was as popular as was her husband the chaplain.

"Yes, I have been beating about the bush, rather, so will tell you all we know about the pretty Madge," Captain Taylor said.

"It is now ten years ago that the Fifth Cavalry, then stationed at Omaha, was out on a hunt for red-skins, for they were raising Cain about that time."

"Crossing the prairie one night they saw ahead what was supposed to be a horseman. It was moonlight, and as it was thought to be an

Indian, the order was given for a surround, and we soon had the horse and rider corraled."

"Imagine our surprise, if you can, when we discovered a young girl of six years, tied to the back of a mustang."

"She was in a Mexican saddle, the stirrups shortened to suit her. She was riding man-fashion, and, as I said, strapped to the saddle."

"A canteen of water was hanging at one side of the saddle-horn, and upon the other a bag of coarse food, with an Indian whip fastened to her wrist."

"She gazed at us in a wondering way, with her large, soulful eyes, and her lips quivered with fear at first, for she had evidently passed through some terrible ordeal of horror and suffering."

"What that ordeal was we did not know; she could not tell, or would not, and we have never discovered."

"But her face was blanched from its recollection, and once spoken kindly to she put her arms about Onderdonk's neck and burst into tears."

"Onderdonk was just back from West Point and we could see him blush in the moonlight, for he had no sisters, and did not remember his mother, even swearing that he never had a sweetheart, and it woke him all up to have that little one hug and kiss him."

"So Chaplain Ben Burton, who was along, relieved Onderdonk of his embarrassment and took the little one in charge and brought her to the fort."

"She was strangely well dressed, and upon her clothing was embroidered the name of 'Baby Madge,' while about her neck hung a locket of gold, in which was a miniature of a beautiful woman."

"Upon the locket was engraved the words:

"MOTHER"

TO

"BABY MADGE."

"Well, Chaplain Ben Burton had just been married a year or so, had no children, and as the Fifth adopted Baby Madge, she was given in to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Burton, who have devoted their lives to her."

"Of course she belongs to the regiment, for we all have a claim upon her. Every soldier gives her a salute when meeting her, while the sentinels all present arms when she passes their post as though she were the commandant."

"She studies under the chaplain, takes lessons in art and music from his wife, and devotes her mornings to teaching the children of the soldiers of the Fifth, from sheer love of the work."

"She has an income, for each soldier of the Fifth chips in twenty-five cents a month, from his pay, and the officers a dollar, which goes to a fund for her, and it foots up considerably as you may understand, in a regiment of six hundred men and some forty officers."

"Yes, and though little enough to any one man, to her it is a handsome sum in the aggregate; but where does she get her name of Mustang Madge, Captain Taylor?" asked Lord Lonsfield.

"Well, first, she was found on the back of a mustang, and second, there is not a mustang, buck or runaway that she cannot ride."

"In fact, she rides anything that goes on four legs, and can throw a lariat with Buffalo Bill, while as a shot only Cody and Surgeon Powell can equal her, either with revolver or rifle."

"She is also an expert with bow and arrow, an athlete, and yet is a refined little woman, accomplished for her years and as wild as an antelope."

"Such is the story, gentlemen, of Mustang Madge."

"Come, and I will present you, but remember, she is not to marry out of the Fifth."

CHAPTER VI.

TWO MAIDENS OF THE BORDER.

"It is a pity, Captain Taylor, that one cannot buy into your American regiments, for I am tempted, after hearing your remark and seeing the Daughter of the Fifth, to see if I cannot get a transfer from the Queen's service to your cavalry," said Sir John Reeder.

"Do you know we have had requests for transfers to the Fifth from officers who have fallen in love with *Our Daughter* and know our iron-clad rules regarding her?"

"But come, I must not keep you corraled here when half the ladies in the house are anxious to meet you."

"Let us just pay our compliments to the colonel's lady, then drop down the scale of rank among the ladies until we come to Mustang Madge," and as Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk just then came up, the four officers left the dressing-room where they had been standing, and made their way to where the colonel stood with the officers next in rank and their ladies about him.

Though the Englishmen had met a number of the officers of the fort, and several of the ladies in the two days they had been at the fort, this was their *debut* in public and every eye was upon them.

Each was dressed in the handsome, full uniforms of their respective regiments and upon their breasts glittered a number of decorations won in service.

Both were splendid fellows and preferred to be called by their military titles than by those which they had inherited.

Their striking appearance, in contrast with more somber uniforms of the American officers would have made them the cynosure of all eyes had their handsome presence not done so, for they were both most fine looking men, courtly in manners and full of soldierly grace and *bonhomie*.

Having made their *devoirs* to the colonel and those next to him, they were led to where Chaplain Burton, his wife and "Lady Madge" stood, surrounded by full a score of others, for the band was not yet playing dancing music.

"My daughter Madge," said Captain Taylor with mock gravity:

"Permit me to present to you Colonel Lord Lucien Lonsfield and Captain Sir John Reeder of the British Service," and Captain Taylor turned to talk with Mrs. Burton and the chaplain, to whom he had just presented the Englishmen.

Lord Lonsfield and Sir John bowed low before the Daughter of the Fifth, and as they straightened up saw her tiny hands extended while she said in her sweet, frank way, and in a voice full and melodious:

"Of course being an American I must shake hands and welcome you to the frontier, while as you are the friends of my Six Hundred Papas you must also be my friends."

The words were simple, uttered with a *naivete* that was charming, and the two Englishmen felt that they stood in the presence of a very refined young miss, whatever her antecedents may have been.

At once they entered into conversation with her, and were charmed with her wit and repartee, while they found her posted on what was going on in the world in general.

"How is it, may I ask, that I find a frontier maiden up in the political history of the world, Miss Burton?"

"First, my Lord Lonsfield, let me tell you that I am simply Madge, not claiming promotion yet to the rank of Miss; but to answer your question, I can only say that, though isolated, we have here the papers—from the New York *Herald* and *Tribune*, the New Orleans *Picayune* and San Francisco *Chronicle*, to the London *Times*, which is nicknamed the *Thunderer*, and the *Figaro* of France, and other papers of foreign countries.

"I read and hear read the news of the world, for we American girls are allowed to know something out of school-books."

"You are a phenomenal young lady, Miss Madge," Sir John Reeder remarked.

"Thanks, so have said my gallant Six Hundred Papas, and I believe every word they utter of course."

"Now go and talk to some of what you would call in England, the dowagers, for I am not a monopolist even of such pleasant company."

"And leave you to your beaux?"

"I haven't a beau in the world, my Lord Lonsfield."

"Then you are another wonder of the world," laughed Lord Lonsfield, and the two officers bowed and took Mustang Madge's advice to go and join the older ladies in the room so as to make themselves "solid" with mammas and young married women, for the younger maidens would be ready for a flirtation, dance or promenade with the two "lions" at any time.

"Well, Sir John, what do you make of her?" asked Lord Lonsfield, as the two walked away.

"A little wonder, beautiful, refined, *chic* and dangerous."

"You have described her *in toto*."

"Her golden bronze hair is in fine contrast with her glorious brown eyes, and her form is simply perfection for one so young."

"Such a woman in London would create a *furor* and deservedly," and the two friends joined a group of elderly ladies who received them most graciously.

During the evening they each had a waltz with Mustang Madge, and with one other who was known as Bessie Bond.

She was a very lovely girl with a wealth of golden hair and black eyes, a slender, graceful form, and dwelt with her mother, a widow, on a ranch some miles distant from the fort, and beyond the settlement.

More than that the mother and daughter had bought the ranch, and came from Texas, nothing was known of them.

They were quiet people, refined in manner, and lived a life of seclusion, though much admired at the fort, whither they were always invited to all the entertainments, to once in a while accept.

They were presumably well off, had a couple of negro servants at their house, and several cowboys to look after their cattle, while Bessie was known as the "Boss," and took full charge of the ranch.

She danced divinely, was witty, yet inclined to sarcasm, and met the Englishmen as she

would have two second lieutenants, appearing not in the least impressed.

She was a fearless girl, a daring rider, good shot, went where she pleased alone, by night or day, and once had defended herself from a drunken desperado by putting a bullet in his brain.

A belle she certainly would have been at the fort, had she permitted herself to be so styled, but instead she kept severely in seclusion except at long intervals.

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERIOUS MEXICAN.

BESSIE BOND was an odd mixture of a wild frontier girl and a society woman, for she could be either at will.

She encouraged no visitors, yet was always willing to go upon a hunt on the plains with a party, and at such times kept well up with the leaders, Mustang Madge being the only one whose superiority she acknowledged in the saddle.

Just to keep from being "cut," she would accept certain entertainments at Social Hall, but never at any household, except that of Chaplain Burton, was she on intimate terms.

Her mother was a sad-faced, refined woman of forty-five, who seemed out of place upon the frontier.

Between Bessie Bond and Mustang Madge there was a certain comradeship which both appeared to enjoy.

They rode together, sung duets, sketched and hunted in partnership.

The "Ranch Isle" as the Bond Ranch was known, was oddly situated.

It was in a bend of the river, which at high water became an island.

There was a ford at the point of the bend, and elsewhere the banks all around were high and steep, the river wider than at other points, and deeper.

The place was thus wholly protected, except at the ford, and there was the cowboys' camp, and they were five in number.

The plot of land thus surrounded by the river, for the neck was hardly a hundred yards in width, comprised some three thousand acres, mostly meadow land, with some fine timber here and there.

Upon a rise, heavily timbered, the cabin and outbuildings were located, and there was a garden, some young fruit trees and quantities of flowers about the house.

The cabin had five rooms, was carpeted, fairly well furnished and possessed a piano, some paintings, and a good library.

Such was Bessie Bond, her mother and her home, and though a mystery at the fort the maiden was well liked, and quite won the two Englishmen as a *bona fide* border girl, a *rara avis* never met with in the old countries.

Another person who was considered as "a man with a history" at Fort Beauvoir, was a Mexican by the name of Don Eduardo Vincente.

He had come to the fort a year before, having a letter of introduction from a Mexican officer of the army whom Colonel Loyal knew intimately, and said that he was desirous of making the settlement his home.

He was accompanied by a valet, guide and companion, the three in one, who was an American, though he affected Mexicanisms, dressed so like a dude that he was known as Dandy Dan, and was noted as the best hand at cards on the border, unless it was the man whom he acknowledged as his master.

The Don bought a ranch and cattle from an ex-army officer who wished to go East, paid cash for it, fitted up his house and lived the life of a hermit most of the time, though he would occasionally emerge from his seclusion and visit the fort, attending the club where he was made welcome and the entertainments at Social Hall.

He was a handsome man, with a bronzed, but not very dark complexion, wore his jet-black hair long, falling far down his back, was profuse in his display of diamonds, in shirt-front, scarf and rings, and dressed in the cavalier style of his country and most elegantly.

His sombrero rim was encircled by real gold pesos and the band was a solid chain of many links of gold.

The two Englishmen were struck with his appearance, for it was a night when he chose to accept an invitation to the fort, and had asked Captain Taylor who he was.

The reply of the captain was characteristic: "A Mexican, who, for some reason, prefers to seclude himself in these wilds rather than enjoy his wealth in the city of Mexico, or the capitals of Europe."

"A man of wondrous information, who speaks English with but a slight accent, conversing also in French and German."

"A brilliant fellow, who can sing well, play cards like a professional gambler, ride, shoot, and who is not afraid of the devil."

"He has a valet who is half-companion, one-fourth guide, and one-fourth slave, and he follows him like his shadow."

"See! there is the man; Dandy Dan they call him, though the Don calls him *Amigo*," and the

captain pointed to the Mexican's valet, standing near the dressing-room door.

"Like master, like man," muttered Lord Lonsfield, from some reason not fancying the Mexican, though both he and Sir John met him during the evening.

When at last the evening of pleasure drew to a close, the two Englishmen went with Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk to the Officers' Club for a "night-cap," and for an hour or more they sat chatting together.

"Well, my lord, what think you of American army life upon the frontier?" asked Captain Taylor.

"There is certainly an irresistible charm about it for me, I confess."

"It is so different from life at home, or in India, Africa, and elsewhere I have served."

"Now, I do not know when I have met a man just like Don Eduardo Vincente, and he positively fascinated me before we parted."

"Then, Mrs. Bond is a strange woman to live the life she does upon a ranch, in constant danger, too, while her daughter I admired greatly, for she is a character in her way."

"As for Miss Mustang Madge, I know not where I have met a more lovely girl, while your brother officers and their families are hospitable, highly cultured, and frank and honest far beyond our stolid, cold English way."

"Yes, we shall enjoy our stay here far more than we could have dreamed possible," Sir John added, and raising his glass, he drank:

"To our American cousins."

CHAPTER VIII.

A HUNT ON HORSEBACK.

FROM the night of the entertainment at Social Hall, a round of festivities began, in which the two Englishmen were the central figures.

They were dined by the Officers' Club, then by Colonel Loyal in a state dinner, and afterward followed invitations to dine and take supper first in one officer's family then another's, until Lord Lonsfield and Sir John expressed themselves in danger of being killed by too great hospitality.

The chaplain also invited them to dine, and there were present, besides the three of the household and two Englishmen, Bessie Bond and her mother, Don Eduardo Vincente and Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk, with the wife and daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel Barrington, the second in command of the fort.

It was a most delightful dinner, the chaplain knowing well how to entertain, in which he was most ably assisted by his wife and Madge.

After dinner there was music, and until a late hour the guests remained, all charmed with their entertainment.

When leaving, Bessie Bond put her pretty little foot down that no one was to escort her mother and herself home, for this was her inviolable rule, and with feelings akin to reproach against themselves, Lord Lonsfield and Sir John saw them mount their horses and dash away alone in the darkness, for Mrs. Bond was also an accomplished horsewoman.

"Well, if harm befalls them, never will I forgive myself," said Lord Lonsfield.

"Nor would I," added Sir John.

"We have all felt the same way, gentlemen, but if you had accompanied them, or should follow them as a measure of caution, they would never forgive you," Captain Alfred Taylor remarked, and soon after the gentlemen departed for a glass at the club and then for their respective quarters.

The following day the colonel organized a hunt on horseback, which the ladies who were good horsemen were to attend.

There were nearly two-score of these, and among them were Bessie Bond and Mustang Madge, both splendidly mounted upon their favorite horses.

"Mustang Madge is in for a breakneck pace to-day, for she is mounted upon that devil of a horse, Imp," muttered Lieutenant-Colonel Barrington as Mustang Madge dashed up mounted upon a claybank with long silver mane and tail and with an eye like the vicious fiend that he was.

Madge was dressed in a blue habit, fitting her form perfectly, and trimmed with the cavalry colors, while upon her saddle-housing was the legend:

"FIFTH CAVALRY, U. S. A."

She wore upon her head an officer's hat, encircled by a gold cord, and shaded with a heavy yellow plume, while it was looped up with a pair of small gold crossed sabers, swung to a pin representing the head of a horse with eyes of diamonds, a gift of the men of the regiment.

Bessie Bond was mounted upon a black horse that was noted for speed and endurance, and she sat in her saddle with the skill and grace of a perfect horsewoman.

The Don was there also, riding a black horse with white eyes, and with a very ugly look of viciousness in spite of his beauty.

Don Eduardo was a splendid horseman and his saddle and bridle, of the Mexican pattern, bespangled with solid silver, were worth a thousand dollars.

His dress was gorgeous in the extreme, but very elegant, and his huge, jingling Mexican spurs were of solid gold.

Near him followed his "Shadow," Dandy Dan.

There was no doubt but that the Englishmen admired the seat in the saddle of the American women, though they looked a little dubious at the two-score mounted officers who rode so differently from British soldiers.

Buffalo Bill was to be the guide, though he and Surgeon Powell had just returned from an extended hunt together, it was said.

The scout looked very grand mounted on his snow-white charger with his elegant frontier trappings, and yet he, too, was open to the criticism of the Englishmen, as was also Surgeon Powell, who rode with the skill and grace of a Comanche.

Colonel Loyal sat well in his saddle and was well mounted, while Captain Alfred Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk were noted as the two roughest and yet most graceful riders in the regiment, Frank Powell excepted.

Chaplain Burton appeared upon a fiery charger, for as he explained to Lord Lonsfield he enjoyed a struggle with "a devil of a horse, it was so like fighting sin."

When the bugle notes sounded the assembly, all were ready, and there were nearly a hundred of them ready for the daring sport of a buffalo-hunt.

Mustang Madge, Bessie Bond and several others of the ladies, married and single, were armed with light rifles or revolvers, and the scene was a grand and picturesque one as the cavalcade set forth, the bugler sounding merry notes as they rode along, and several negroes bringing up the rear leading pack-horses loaded down with a cold lunch and something to wash it down with.

"A grand sight truly, and ahead of anything I have ever seen in a hunting field in England."

"We only need the dogs to make it perfect," said Lord Lonsfield admiringly.

"And a pack of hounds here would spoil our sport, my lord," responded Madge who rode upon the other side of the nobleman.

CHAPTER IX.

A MAD CHASE.

UNDER the guidance of Buffalo Bill a large herd of buffalo was found some eight miles from the fort, and the guide at once marshaled his forces for the chase.

The more timid ones among the ladies, the supply animals and servants, with several officers who did not care to join in the chase, were sent to a distant wooded hill where a grand sweep of the prairie for many miles could be had, and to which point the hungry hunters would return for luncheon when tired of the maddening and perilous run of the prairie rovers.

The others were divided into squads, Buffalo Bill being very careful to select the best hunters and riders for the most dangerous position.

In this latter party were the two Englishmen, Surgeon Powell, Don Eduardo, Captain Alf Taylor, Lieutenant Onderdonk and five ladies, two of whom were Mustang Madge and Bessie Bond.

The bugle at last sounded the charge, and over the ridge went the dozen different squads starting from their various points of vantage, and with wild cries they went down the slope like mad.

They had the wind of the vast herd of buffalo, and, not being seen until they approached over the ridge, it was a complete surprise to the wild animals.

Colonel Loyal and his party had gained the distant hilltop just as the high notes rung out, so they had a general view of the spreading prairie, the herd of a thousand buffalo, the dozen different squads, stretching out a mile in length, and the surprise.

Buffalo Bill had chosen his position well and went to the front like a rocket.

But over the ridge with him, close at his heels came the rest of his squad, and as they went down the slope Madge went by him like an arrow.

"Not so fast, Miss Madge, over this ground, for our horses will catch the herd soon enough," shouted the scout.

But in vain, for the girl's nerve was up, and she was out for game.

"My God! she will be killed!" cried Lord Lonsfield, in alarm, while Surgeon Powell called out:

"We must catch up with her."

"Yes, overtake her," Sir John had cried, and as he did so, Bessie Bond also went to the front.

The Englishmen were mounted on as fine horses as there were in the fort, and rode in that heavy, rough English way, which somewhat disconcerted the animals they bestrode, while the Americans with light seats in the saddles, their toes firmly touching the stirrups, and bodies erect, appeared to be of little weight upon their horses, and sent them flying along with the greatest ease and speed.

"Heaven help those two girls, Sir John," cried Lord Lonsfield, as the two Englishmen dropped slowly behind the others of their squad.

"They ride like very devils," was the answer, and it was intended as a compliment though it did not appear like one.

"I give it up, Sir John, the American women are the finest horse-women in the world."

"Yes, my lad, and the pluckiest—just see them all along the line."

"But especially those in our party."

"Yes, but what of the men, Sir John?"

"How?"

"As riders?"

"I begin to feel that they outride us, my lad."

"In speed yes, though these animals are said to be very fleet."

"Sir John, I am taking lessons in horsemanship."

"How so, my lad?"

"We Englishmen all ride well, stick well and are rough riders and fearless; but the light seat of the Americans which we criticised is their strong point, and they are even more daring than English riders, stick even better, aid their horses more and are graceful in the saddle as well, which we are not."

"I begin to agree with you, my lad, and I shall take lessons of Buffalo Bill or Powell, for it is live and learn with me."

"We can both learn a lesson from whatever we see to day; but look! the Mustang Maiden has struck the herd and if she is not killed it will be a miracle."

"Heaven help her!" was the fervent ejaculation of Sir John, and the two spurred their horses on, for they were all of a hundred yards behind the others now, with Mustang Madge in the herd, Bessie Bond near her and Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill close on the heels of the last named lady rider.

Fleet as a deer and not feeling her light weight, the horse of Mustang Madge had pulled ahead of all others and carried her in among the rear line of rushing buffaloes.

She was seen to unsling her repeating rifle from her back and lay it across her lap, an act which fairly frightened the two Englishmen who saw that she had placed the reins over the saddle-horn.

They did not know that a well-trained buffalo-hunting horse would not need guidance once in a herd of the animals, but would take good care of himself and his rider if left alone.

The two British officers had fought lions in Africa, tigers and elephants in the jungles of India, hunted foxes across a rough-riding and dangerous country in England, but never had they known the thrill of exquisite sport until they beheld Mustang Madge in the midst of that maddened herd of buffalo, and heard her rifle ringing out shot after shot as she turned it upon the huge brutes, first upon one side then upon the other.

"Great God! Reeder, will we never get there?" shouted Lord Lonsfield, in the delirious excitement of the chase.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHAMPIONS.

AMID the thunder of thousands of hoofs, resounding like the continued roar of a battle, as the frightened, flying herd dashed on, a mad bull bellowing savagely now and then in his fierce fury, the cheer from the party on the hill-top did not reach the ears of Madge at her being the first one amid the herd, the first to open fire and drop her game.

But the two officers back in the rear heard the cheer, and it told them that the maiden was applauded for her pluck.

Again they sunk the spurs deep in their horses and pressed on.

They saw Buffalo Bill pass Bessie Bond and dash in among the herd, with Surgeon Powell next and neck and neck with the fair "Maid of the Ranch."

Close behind came Don Eduardo with Captain Alfred Taylor almost by his side, and Caro Sidway, the daughter of Major Sidway, neck and neck with Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk, made up the group.

A moment more and the crack of the scout's rifle was heard, and following quickly came the reports of the weapons of Surgeon Powell and Bessie Bond.

A minute later, almost together flashed the rifles of the quartette riding so close together, and as they sped on, the two English officers now saw that their track was filled with dead and dying buffalo.

But their well-trained buffalo-hunters avoided the animals with a shy or a leap, and glancing up and down the line, Lord Lonsfield cried:

"Not another squad has yet struck the herd but ours, Sir John."

"We must not let them do so before ourselves."

"Never!" and again the spurs were plied, where there was no need of it, for the buffalo-hunters they bestrode knew what was expected of them, and were already doing their best to reach the herd, only that heavy English seat in the saddle was worse than an extra weight of thirty pounds would have been in an American rider.

But a moment more, and amid the cracking of rifles ahead, the two Englishmen dashed into the thick of the herd, and their weapons, too, began

to rattle forth death-shots upon the shaggy monsters.

"This is the acme of sport, Sir John," shouted Lord Lonsfield.

"Yes, it surpasses all I ever dreamed of, came the answer back, with a yell, followed quickly by the words:

"Look at that girl!"

"Which of the three?"

"All of them; but I referred to the Mustang Maid—ah! a splendid shot that of yours, and while your horse was in the air, leaping a dead buffalo."

"It was a good one," complacently said Lord Lonsfield, and he added:

"What splendid hunters these horses, for they do the work, we simply the trigger pulling."

"The girl is gaining a ill!"

"Yes, and laying out a buffalo at every crack of the rifle."

"So is Cody!"

"All are, for that matter."

"The other squads are closing in now."

"Yes; hark to the merry music of the rifles!"

"It is music, indeed, far sweeter than the cry of a pack in full run; but I have emptied my weapons."

"As I have."

"Listen to the others."

"Yes, and the Mustang Maiden still fires."

"She must have an arsenal along."

"No, I have it!"

"What is it?"

"She loads as she runs."

"So do the others."

"Then we must do the same."

And they did, to once more revel in the delicious sensation of a sport far beyond their expectations of what they had ever believed a buffalo-hunt could be, or they had ever enjoyed before.

And so the mad chase went on until miles had been gone over and the prairie behind from near the foot of the ridge was dotted with trails of black objects which denoted the game that had fallen.

Where each squad had struck the herd a black dotted trail had been left.

The trail of the Buffalo Bill squad first showed the fallen game, and thicker lay the dead buffalo on it than on the trails of the other squads.

At last Buffalo Bill had given the signal, for in a buffalo-hunt he was master, and placing a bugle to his lips Lieutenant Onderdonk sounded long and loud the call:

"Cease firing!"

The recall came next, when he saw that the bugle had been heard, and the different squads now drew rein, and the vast herd, thinned by the loss of hundreds, swept on in the same untiring lope as before.

The panting horses were turned back toward the ridge, while to the ears of the riders came the sound of the distant cheer from the timbered hill.

"Miss Madge, you are the champion, for you dropped thirty-nine buffaloes on the run, beating me by two," said Buffalo Bill.

And then he went on to make the count for the others, Surgeon Powell being a tie with Captain Taylor and Bessie Bond, with Lieutenant Onderdonk, Miss Caro Sidway, Don Eduardo and the two English officers counting twenty each.

"Our squad's trail shows a hundred more buffalo than any of the others," said Captain Taylor, and the party gave a cheer in their own honor at the suggestion of Lord Lonsfield, who, with Sir John were congratulated for their excellent record as "Tenderfeet," in their first buffalo-hunt.

"Mustang Madge and Buffalo Bill are the champions," cried Captain Taylor as the party rode back toward the ridge.

CHAPTER XI.

FRONTIER COURTESY.

WITH drooping heads the horses of the different squads turned their steps back toward the ridge, a few of the animals showing ugly wounds from a horn thrust at them in the chase.

An officer had a bad gash in his leg, another a bruise from the fall of his horse, and some of the ladies' habits were torn, as the casualties of the hunt.

"My skirt is a perfect wreck, and my horse has two wounds," said Madge as she patted the wounded animal.

"The only wonder is that you were not killed, Miss Madge, for Sir John and I gave you up for lost from the very first."

"Oh, no, my lord, my horse is a trained buffalo-hunter, and then I am so fond of the exciting sport I forget the peril; but you and Sir John are the champions, I think, considering you were both tenderfeet."

"Tenderfeet, Miss Madge?"

"Yes, but pardon me, for I supposed you had heard that appellation applied to all who do not know our Wild Western ways."

"You have proven yourselves not to deserve the title of being a tenderfoot, I think."

"Not until they have met the red-skins, Senorita Madge, or been held up by The Deserters," suggested Don Eduardo.

"Then we have still to face the music in an

Indian fight, Miss Madge, before we can wipe off the verdure from our countenances?"

"Yes, my lord, and be held up by The Deserters, Don Eduardo says as well."

"May I ask who The Deserters are?"

"Pray explain, Don Eduardo, for you have had experience among them," said Madge with a wicked smile.

"Maldito, yes, senorita!"

"They robbed me of many pesos, and jewels as well."

"Then they are robbers?"

"Yes, Senor Lord Lonsfield, they are a band of outlaws, known as The Deserters, and claiming to be deserters from the army."

"At any rate they dress in the United States uniform, with cavalry, artillery and infantry colors, and invest the stage and wagon trails, raid the settlements, and rob travellers generally."

"Can they not be captured and put to death?"

"We have tried that, my lord," said Captain Taylor.

"But they are as cunning as Indians, have their spies, I believe, in our camps, and know the country as well as the red-skins, who are their allies, for they retreat to the Indian country when pursued; but see, we are joining the other squads now."

The other parties cheered the victors as they rode up in squads, and the column of hunters having reunited, went on up to the ridge to join the lookers-on, Buffalo Bill having cut some juicy steaks from a buffalo to give the Englishmen a chance to enjoy a treat.

As they approached the hill-top, they were welcomed with cheers, and the colonel at once presented the ladies with silver pins representing a buffalo-head, while the victor, Mustang Madge, was given a gold buffalo as her trophy, and as an act of courtesy Lord Lonsfield and Sir John also received a silver buffalo as a badge, while upon a scroll, to which it was suspended, was to be engraven the number of buffalo they had killed upon their first hunt, the name of the fort, the date of the hunt, and their own names.

Lord Lonsfield made a very apt speech in response, for himself and Sir John Reeder, in which he very frankly admitted that Americans could teach the world how to ride, and they had received a lesson they would never forget; while for pluck and horsemanship, he had never seen the equal of the ladies who had ridden that day.

Luncheon followed, and a very tempting repast it was, while the health of the two distinguished guests was drunk with a burrah, and the compliment responded to by Sir John most cleverly.

After a couple of hours' rest the party mounted for the homeward trail, while a troop of soldiers with wagons were visible upon the prairie gathering in the game to cure and put away as rations for the soldiers.

Wholly delighted with their day of sport, the party returned to the fort, when the contingent there had to drink bumpers over the success of the two guests, and until a late hour the English officers were kept up enjoying the hospitality of the Americans.

At last they were enabled to beat a retreat to their own quarters, and on the way Lord Lonsfield said:

"I can tell you, Sir John, all the hospitality of the world is not centered in the British Isles."

"Not by any means, my lord, for another such a day and its sequence as this would kill me," was the doleful answer.

"All we need now is a fight with Indians and to be held up by outlaws, as they call it out here, to make us real bordermen."

"So it seems; but I am a tenderfoot to-night, tender-headed, tender-bodied, in fact as sore as a toothache from sole to crown."

"Oh, so am I, but I guess we'll get used to it—Ah! some one is on our piazza."

"Yes, and who, for we can stand no more this night of our Lord, and which I shall never forget."

"Nor I—Ah! is that you, Mr. Cody?"

"Yes, sir, and as I have had no opportunity to speak with you to-day I came to-night to tell you that I have picked up one end of that blind trail, and when you are ready to start upon it, command me."

"Good-night, gentlemen," and the scout walked away toward his quarters, while Lord Lonsfield muttered:

"A very remarkable man, that?"

"Yes, a very remarkable people, these Americans, to the manor born," was Sir John's comment.

CHAPTER XII.

PICKING UP A TRAIL.

THE buffalo-hunt was over, and the garrison had settled down to the daily routine of work, excepting that there was more entertaining than usual on account of the presence of the English guests.

A strange circumstance of their entertaining was that Don Eduardo Vincente and Bessie Bond the fair rancher were almost constantly in attendance at the dinners, suppers and dances given, never missing one given at the Social Hall.

Of course there were those who said that the Don was hoping to get a large stake at cards out of the Englishmen, while the lovely Bessie was simply playing to win a high stake in a baronet or noble of the British aristocracy.

But these two gentlemen had shown no marked preference for any one.

If anything they were more marked in their attentions to the elderly ladies and married women, though they were both known to be bachelors.

Mustang Madge they certainly did admire greatly, and seemed to lean toward her with deepest interest, for there was something in the frank manner, wit and pluck of the girl, so different from English girls that won them wholly.

Bessie Bond too they greatly admired, but she was a mystery to them as to all else at the fort.

Don Eduardo they found a very fascinating companion, yet there was something about him that they could not wholly put trust in him.

The colonel and all his officers they were delighted with, while the strongest friendship had sprung up between them and Captain Taylor and his lieutenant, Otey Onderdonk.

There was also the same friendly regard felt for Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, whom the more they studied the more they admired.

Altogether the English officers were having a most charming time at the fort, though they did not lose sight of the cause of their coming to the American frontier.

The more they saw of wild life, from the standpoint of a border fort, the more they admired it, comparing the uncivilized with the refinement of army society, which was in no way affected by its surroundings of semi-barbarism.

With perfect confidence in Buffalo Bill and Doctor Frank Powell, who had consented to pick up the trail of the lost heir, they did not hurry them, but bided their time in patience.

The hunt had shown them a new phase in life, and that American women were as brave as the men, either in sport or tragedy.

They had seen them risk life with a smile upon their faces, use their rifles with skill, and bring down their game without wincing.

"These Americans are great people, Sir John," Lord Lonsfield would say over and over again, and receive the assuring response that he was fully agreed with.

The morning after the hunt the two officers arose late.

They had put on no airs, bringing a lot of servants and baggage with them, having only a valet who served for both, and a couple of well-supplied traveling cases, for their well-filled purses could furnish with all they might need when wanted.

They had not loaded themselves down as walking arsenals, to fight Indians with, but had contented themselves with a gunning outfit, rifles and revolvers.

They were just lighting their cigars after a substantial breakfast, when they saw three persons enter the little gate leading to the comfortable cabin assigned to them by the colonel.

They were Captain Taylor, Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill.

The visitors were greeted most cordially, and when seated Captain Taylor said:

"My lord, I have come with Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, for they have a report to make to you."

"Yes, Mr. Cody hinted last night that he had made some discovery, but it was after our first buffalo-hunt and we were not responsible for not hearing more, seeing which he very kindly withdrew."

"Yes, I saw that you were both very tired," said Buffalo Bill dryly, but his remark brought laughter from all, while Sir John said:

"You have great powers of penetration, Cody, for we were as tired as men can be and not drop from fatigue; but we are all right this morning, for you know an Englishman's strong point is drinking himself under the mahogany at dinner, and after half an hour's nap and a bath, join the ladies for a dance and a flirtation, none the worse for what you are pleased to call fatigue."

"Yes, when an Englishman has had too much he slides under the table, while we Americans overflow with spirits and insist on getting upon the table to make a spread eagle oration, until some kind friend puts us to bed there to remain until the morning when our heads are so enlarged we have to put our hats on with a shoe-horn," remarked Powell.

After a few more bantering remarks, Captain Taylor said:

"Now let us hear what our scouts have to say, as they will have to again depart in a couple of days to pick up the trail they have discovered."

All was now attention, and acting as first spokesman Surgeon Powell began his story.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRACING THE LOST HEIR.

WHEN all were ready to hear what discoveries Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill had made, the former said:

"Armed with the data you gave us, my lord, Cody and myself went to the mines and began work."

"We had the likenesses you gave us of your kinsman, with his side-whiskers and without beard, and we discovered several old miners who knew him."

Asking his name they said he was known there as Goldust, the name doubtless being changed from Goldhurst.

"They also said that he had pictures of a lovely young woman and little girl, whom he said were his wife and child."

"But he was not married."

"It may be so, my lord, or he may have been and you never have known it."

"As I told you his duel with my brother was on account of their rivalry for a maiden they both loved, and Granger Goldhurst was a man who could love but once."

"Of that you know best my lord; but the several miners whom I saw were, or said they were, his intimate friends, and they saw these pictures of a young woman, and a little girl of two years, and he carried them with him always."

"Could it have been Granger Goldhurst?" asked Sir John.

"To convince you that it was, sir, I need only say that we went to his old cabin and found it deserted and a ruin."

"But we looked for something with which to identify the former dweller, and Buffalo Bill found it."

"Ah!"

"Yes, he detected over the doorway, cut into the log as skillfully as a wood-cutter could have done it, just what I have written here upon this paper."

He handed over to Lord Lonsfield a paper upon which was written as follows and which the nobleman read aloud:

"GRANGER GOLDHURST

"A MINER AND WANDERER.

"Lived in this cabin for two years, from Oct. 1st, 18—, until Aug. 30th, 18—."

"Struck it rich May 1st, 18—, a date that is burned deep within my memory, never to be effaced."

"Yes, there is now no doubt, for Granger was a splendid hand in wood-cutting, as you know well, Sir John?"

"Yes, there are specimens of his work on many an old tree and fence around the old homestead; but there is another evidence which these words prove."

"Yes, Sir John."

"The date that he, as he calls it, 'struck it rich,' May 1st, 18—, was the day on which he killed Lord Allyn Lonsfield, your brother, Lucien."

"True, very true, and his words show well that he remembers the date but too well."

"Now, Doctor Powell, may I ask you to continue your story, for you have indeed picked up the trail."

Thus urged, Surgeon Powell resumed:

"Convinced that we were right, that we had found our man up to twelve years ago, we started upon the trail of finding out where he had gone from the mines."

"A hard thing to do, indeed."

"Not when we set to work in the right way to accomplish it, my lord," Buffalo Bill remarked, while Doctor Powell continued:

"We returned to the mines to hunt up the old miners."

"There were plenty of them, still digging with the hope of striking a rich lead some day and who had been at it for many years."

"Those who knew Miner Goldhurst when there, spoke of him as a man who held himself aloof from all, except in sickness, when he would become a devoted nurse, even to his enemies."

"That was Granger's nature surely," said Lord Lonsfield.

"They told us of kindnesses he had done, poor miners he had helped, though he had never spoken of having made a rich find."

"When he disappeared from the mines, he went by night, and left a placard on his door giving his cabin and mine to two unfortunate fellows in the mines who had never dug out a pound of gold, but were clever, good men."

"They went to the place and began work, and it was thought that they found a good lead, for they were murdered one night in their cabin, and there was a stone under the hearth removed where they had hidden away their findings."

"Who had gotten their gold, and taken their lives no one ever knew."

"They were buried by the cabin, which was never again occupied."

"From these old miners we learned that Goldust, as they called Mr. Goldhurst, had taken a northern trail, and that he had carried away gold with him they believed, for he had bought several horses from the miners, and their tracks led toward the northern settlements."

"We accordingly took the trail for the two settlements, Buffalo Bill going to one, and I to the other."

"The settlement I sought had prospered fairly well, and there were some well-to-do ranchers scattered about in the valley."

"Several of them had lived there over a dozen years, and these I sought."

"After much conversation upon the subject I got a clew to Mr. Goldhurst.

"He had come to the ranch of one of these settlers, according to dates, some days after leaving his cabin.

"He rode one horse, and had two in lead, and said his name was Goldust, and that he had been a miner.

"He was looking for a place to settle, spent some days at the ranch, and not pleased with the country took his departure."

"Could you ascertain whither he went from there?"

"I could only discover the trail he took, for the settler rode some miles with him on his way.

"I showed him the pictures, with some I had and asked him to pick out his man."

"He did so?"

"Yes, sir, he at once picked out the picture of Mr. Goldhurst."

"And then?"

"I went on the trail, though I knew that ranches were few and far between that way, as an Indian raid had destroyed them years before, and all in one settlement had been massacred.

"But Buffalo Bill had gone that way, to discover who yet dwelt in the ruined settlement, and I hoped to find him there, and tell him of my discovery.

"I was not disappointed, for the next evening I rode into Bill's camp, and he too had made a discovery, so he can tell the rest, gentlemen."

CHAPTER XIV.

BUFFALO BILL'S STORY.

THAT Doctor Powell and Buffalo Bill had not lost their time, in the three weeks they had been about on the trail of the lost heir, the story the of Surgeon Scout had proven.

Lord Lonsfield and Sir John were all excitement to hear what the scout had to say, and he began his story in his off-hand manner that was very attractive to the listener.

"I wish I had more to tell you than I have, gentlemen, but I fear I cannot give you a great deal of satisfaction.

"When I left Surgeon Powell, I took the trail to what is now known as Massacre Valley, for it was once a settlement, and at the time when Miner Goldhurst left the mines.

"I had heard that a few ranches were still in the valley, settlers who had escaped the massacre or had moved there since, so I deemed it best to look it over.

"Some two years, or about that time, after Mr. Goldhurst left the mines, the Sioux made a raid at night into the valley and few, if any one escaped death, while their homes were burned and their cattle run off.

"It was after that that the valley came to bear its present name.

"I knew of an old trapper who trapped through that part of the country, and had known most of the settlers, and I hoped to have found him.

"I discovered the story that other settlers had gone in there was not so, for not a home could I find.

"There were a number of graves here and there, near the burned homes of the settlers, showing that some one had buried the massacred people; but not a cabin was left standing, fields were overgrown, and desolation rested upon all.

"Above these groups of graves—and there were some thirty of them—a head-board was placed, bearing the names of those who had dwelt in the home near by.

"There was one cabin which had no graves about it, no head-board with a name, and it yet appeared to have been one of the largest and best of the houses in the valley.

"After some search I found the old trapper I spoke of.

"He was just preparing to leave the valley, as he said, for the last time, having laid by a fair sum of money to live on, for he is getting quite old.

"Now, if old Trapper Dennis is not an immortal liar, there may be something in the story he told me which will be of service to you gentlemen, but the old fellow was wont to tell yarns about his exploits which would make the hair raise on a grizzly's back.

"What he told me, however, that may bear on this case, was that he knew the man Goldhurst, and he called him by that name.

"He described him to me, and when I showed him the pictures, he said that was the very man."

"And what did he say of him?" asked Lord Lonsfield.

"He was visiting the valley, Trapper Dennis said, when Goldhurst came there.

"He came with several horses and put up at a settler's house, which he showed me in the valley, or rather where it had stood, and where the trapper was stopping at the time.

"After remaining some weeks or so in the valley, riding off alone by day, he returned one night and told the settler and Dennis that he had bought a ranch.

"The ranch he had purchased was the best one in the settlement, and he had gotten it from a man who had had a fortune left him, and was going East.

"He bought furniture, horses, cattle and all

from the man, and paid him in gold, just as it had been dug out of the mines, and he seemed to be well supplied with it.

"Having bought the ranch the miner set to work fitting it up, and in this he spared no expense, hiring the ranch hands in the settlement to help him.

"Leaving some one in charge, he then went off on a trip, as he said, to bring his family.

"He was gone several months, and when he returned came by wagon-train, and the settlers turned out to see the outfit, for it was a complete one.

"There were a dozen wagons and an ambulance.

"In the latter rode a lady and little child, and a negress, while there was a negro man acting as driver.

"A youth of seventeen was on horseback with the miner, and then there were the drivers of the wagons, men hired from an Overland stage station, a hundred miles away.

"The wagons were loaded with house furniture, utensils for farming, grain and provisions, while two held poultry, such as geese, turkeys, ducks and chickens, and another had several pairs of pigs and sheep.

"In fact, Trapper Dennis said the miner had come to stay, and was going to make himself contented and comfortable.

"Two of the wagons and teams he kept, along with the ambulance, and a couple of the men remained with him as farm hands, the remainder returning with the wagon-train to the Overland Station.

"The name of the boss of the train the trapper told me, and I know him well, or did, if he is not dead, for he was a rough man, and a good deal on the fight.

"The last I heard of him he was at Overland City, a hundred miles from here, and he could give the truth of the affair if he is living.

"He was known as Boss Bill, and I could find him, I think.

"The place I spoke of as having no name, a head-board, no graves about it, was the ranch which Trapper Dennis pointed out to me as the home of Miner Goldhurst.

"That night the trapper camped with me, and it was there Surgeon Powell joined us."

CHAPTER XV.

DEAD OR ALIVE.

THE story of Buffalo Bill had been listened to with the deepest interest, and when he concluded, at the point where Surgeon Powell had joined the trapper and himself in camp, he waited in silence for some one to speak, apparently feeling there was nothing more for him to say.

"Well, Captain Taylor, Mr. Cody certainly brings a very straight story to prove that our kinsman, Granger Goldhurst, settled in the valley, along with what he claimed to be his family."

"Yes, my lord, it would seem so," answered Captain Taylor.

"And Surgeon Powell corroborates the story by what he discovered."

"Very true."

"Now what is your opinion, please?"

"I would express an opinion of no value, my lord, for it would only be from what Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill report, so I would rather have their views upon the subject," Captain Taylor said.

"So would I like their views," said Sir John.

"Pern it me to add," said Buffalo Bill, "that Trapper Dennis told me that the family of Miner Goldhurst, from some reason, had won the particular hatred of the Sioux, and when the Indians raided the valley they were not only all killed but their bodies were hurled from the cliff down the river into the surging stream, as some mark of red-skin hatred."

"Was this not a strange proceeding, Mr. Cody?"

"No, my lord, for Indians are superstitious, and do a great many mysterious things to bring them luck, or protect them, and this act, if as the trapper states, was doubtless influenced by some chief who sought thus to gain some end.

"Trapper Dennis said that this was seen by a settler whom the Indians made prisoner, but who afterward made his escape and reaching the upper settlement died of his wounds."

"Then this would account for there being no graves at that ranch," suggested Sir John.

"Yes, sir, either that would account for it, or—"

"Or what, Mr. Cody?" asked Lord Lonsfield, when the scout paused.

"I was going to say it would account for there being no graves at that ranch, or that all there were taken prisoners by the Sioux and carried off to their villages."

"To which death were preferable?"

"In many cases, yes, my lord."

"Now, Mr. Cody, pray give us your opinion of all that you have discovered?"

"Well, Lord Lonsfield, there is no doubt in my mind that we trailed the right man, that he struck it rich in the mines, made himself a pleasant home in that valley, brought his family there, which you did not believe he had, and was either killed with all the others, by the Indians, or carried off to their villages.

"If the latter, some of them may be alive, or all may have died, or been put to death.

"As Boss Bill was the train captain, then he must have known Mr. Goldhurst well, and he can give us the best information, so if you wish I can go and fetch him here, or if he will not come, get all the information I can from him, for you can write down the questions you would have me ask him."

"I will do so, and remember, Mr. Cody, you are to spare no expense to ferret this affair to the end, for my purse is open to you for all costs with pleasure.

"Now, after seeing this man, would it be well for us to visit the valley where our kinsman lived?"

"I think so, sir, by all means, for you can get a better knowledge of the situation, and perhaps find some clew which will convince you of the death of your kinsman."

"We will go then upon your return from seeing this trainmaster: but you seem to cast some doubt upon the truthfulness of the old trapper, I believe?"

"I believe he told me the truth, as he recalled it, after all these years, of what he knew of Mr. Goldhurst and the massacre, but he certainly told a very strange story that night in camp to Surgeon Powell and myself."

"Does it refer to Goldhurst in any way?"

"Yes, sir, in a dream."

"Would you mind relating the story to us?"

"No, sir, though I do not wish you to think that there is any law in the land to force you to believe it."

All laughed at this, and Captain Taylor said:

"You must know, Lord Lonsfield, that our bordermen become very much like sailors, given to telling yarns which they begin to believe themselves as they grow in years.

"I have known some liars out here on the plains that would tell a yarn no one on earth could believe, and then wish to shoot you for doubting the truth of what they said."

"Yes, I have had scouts come in and tell me a dozen Indians they had killed in a hand to hand fight, and the only way I could stop their lying was to make them show up the dead red-skins.

"No Injun, no kill," we used to say to them, and one pilgrim, whom the boys called Split Injun Charlie, actually went to where the cavalry had had a brush with some Sioux and dug up three graves and brought them into camp swung across the back of his horse.

"I was watching him all the while, followed him into camp and heard him telling his lie, when I sprung the truth on the boys and Split Injun Charlie went out of camp on the jump and I have never seen him since."

All enjoyed this story of how some bordermen could "dodge the trail of truth," and then Buffalo Bill was asked to relate the tale told him by Trapper Dennis.

CHAPTER XVI.

DREAMS.

"REMEMBER, gentlemen," said Buffalo Bill, "that this is Trapper Dennis's story, not mine, for I am not given to believing in spooks and ghost-walking.

"I have had too many good and true pards go from my side in the twinkling of an eye, men whom I have been on the longest and loneliest trails with, and whose hands I have held while dying, whose last words have been breathed into my ears, who have told me they would come back in the spirit and help me out of perils unknown to me, appear at my side at my call and save me from going the way they had, and yet not one of them has ever come back, not one has ever kept his word, his word when dying, and some of them were men who would rather die than lie, who would have come back to me against all the guards of the Spirit Land, could it have been possible, could it have been that the grave does not end all.

"No, no, I do not believe in spirits, and so it is that I doubt the story of the old trapper, though I believe he thought he was telling the truth when he told it to me."

These words of Buffalo Bill, delivered in an impressive manner, made a deep impression upon all present, the two Englishmen being particularly impressed by what he said and his manner of saying it.

"I believe with you, Mr. Cody, that our spirits, when they leave the body, if there is such a thing as spirits, if it is more than the life that animates us, and which dying leaves our bodies to decay, I believe, I say, with you, that nothing spiritual can return to earth, and ghost stories I regard as only the hallucinations of a brain diseased."

"And dreams, Lord Lonsfield?" asked Surgeon Powell.

"Dreams are unaccountable, but must depend upon one's digestion, for if sleeping sweetly we have pleasant dreams, while if suffering from overeating, or the brain in a whirl from exciting scenes gone through with by day, we can conjure up in slumber deeds diabolical, have a nightmare that is a hell in itself and suffer the torments of the damned."

"Why, after that buffalo-hunt yesterday, and celebrating it last night I dreamt that I was

sailing over a tempestuous sea of rum, in a glass boat, with a huge buffalo bull swimming in full chase, his head lowered ready to butt the frail craft into fragments and leave me to sink forever downward into eternity."

"Did he butt the boat?" asked Sir John, eagerly.

"No, for you had the nightmare and awoke me with your cries before he caught up."

"By Jove! I remember now, I felt that I was falling out of a balloon," laughed Sir John, and all joined in the laughter, while Surgeon Powell remarked:

"Let me tell you of a dream I once had."

All looked quickly at Surgeon Powell, for the captain knew that his life had been one of romance, and the Englishmen had heard much of this remarkable man, gentle as a woman in manner, with a voice low and musical in conversation, kind-hearted as a child, and yet when aroused to just anger his voice would ring like a trumpet, his manner would be full of fire, and his courage nothing could daunt.

Was he going to do what he never did, speak of his past? they wondered.

The silence of all at his words showed their interest in what he would say, without their saying so.

This Surgeon Powell seemed to understand, and so he began his story of a dream:

"It was my misfortune once to have to kill a man who had been my friend.

"He was of a double nature, good at times, evil as Satan at other times.

"He took a dislike to a young man in the mining-camps, an innocent young fellow, who had angered him once by resenting his words to another, and from that day the youth, for he was hardly anything else, lived in terror of his life.

"The young fellow I liked, and had cared for him through an attack of illness, when he told me of his home, and a young bride he had left, to seek a fortune for her in the mines.

"Well, one day a number of miners had their cabins robbed by some sneak thief; and this went on at different times until it was decided to hang the fellow when caught.

"I was going along the trail one day, to see a sick miner, when I came upon a man dying from a wound.

"He told me he was the thief, and said that he had with him the watches and other things stolen from the cabins.

"He was dying then, so I could do him no good, and as my young friend came along, I gave him the bundle of things and told him to take them to the camps with him.

"He met this desperate friend of mine, and the bag he had the things in had been stolen from him, so he, with two others, dragged him to the camps, the things were found upon him, and the miners would hear no excuses; they intended to hang him, my friend leading them on.

"I arrived just as my friend had the noose fastened about the youth's neck, the other end over a limb and made fast to the horn of his saddle, while he was about to lead the horse forward and drag the poor fellow into the air.

"I rode up and demanded the cause, and my friend turned on me like a tiger.

"I saw how matters stood and pronounced the youth innocent; but my friend shouted that it was a lie to save the boy and he started forward with his horse.

CHAPTER XVII.

WARNED BY A DREAM.

SURGEON POWELL paused a moment, as though the scene he was describing came vividly upon his memory.

All sat in silence, his story causing them to feel that the surgeon was relating no idle tale for their amusement simply, but as others had spoken of dreams he had had an experience in dreaming which he wished to make known.

No one saying a word to interrupt, the surgeon continued in the same low, gentle manner natural to him:

"I drew my revolver and told my friend if he moved that horse a step forward, to raise that boy from off the ground, I would kill him.

"He also drew his revolver with one hand, and with a defiant laugh struck the horse with the other.

"It was the last act of his life, for I kept my word.

"Springing forward I severed the lariat and the youth dropped to the ground but little hurt.

"Then I turned to my friend.

"He was dying, and turning his eyes upon me he cried savagely:

"I hate you! curse you! and to your dying day will I haunt you!"

"The words were terrible to listen to and impressed me deeply at the time.

"That night I was by his side until he breathed his last, for he relapsed into unconsciousness after he had spoken.

"He died at dawn, and I had him decently buried, and wrote home to his people that he had been killed, that was all.

"The night following I dreaded, for some reason, but I sunk to sleep and did not awaken until sunrise.

"So the days passed, and I had a long journey to make.

"The night before starting I had a dream.

"I dreamt that I was awakened from a deep sleep by my friend, and as he bent over me he said:

"Frank, I have come to tell you to take the lower trail, for two of your enemies know of your going on this journey, and they intend to ambush and kill you at Black Rock to-morrow when you pass."

"I thanked him, as I thought, in my dream, and then I awoke in reality.

"It was some time before I could realize that he was dead, that it was but a dream; but at last I aroused myself to the truth, and so impressed was I by that dream, I at once made my preparations to depart, mounted my horse, and rode to Black Rock.

"I hid my horse half a mile away, crept back to Black Rock and concealed myself and waited.

"I seemed to feel certain that I had not been warned in vain, and the presentiment was a correct one, for soon I saw coming along the trail two of the worst desperadoes in the mines, and men who hated me most bitterly, as I had blocked their little games of deviltry on several occasions.

"They came within ten feet of me, lay in ambush, and I heard all that they said.

"It told me that they were there to kill me, and after a while I made my presence known to them."

"And had it out with them both?" asked Lord Lonsfield, quickly.

"Yes, my lord."

"You took big chances, Surgeon Powell," Sir John remarked.

"I think not, for they were cowards, threw up their hands at my order to do so, and I made them prisoners, carrying them back to camp with me."

"Where they were tried?"

"Yes, Sir John, by Judge Lynch," was the significant reply.

"What a remarkable dream," thoughtfully remarked Lord Lonsfield.

"You will think it the more remarkable, Lord Lonsfield, when I tell you that my friend kept his dying threat to haunt me, for no less than three times has he appeared to me in a dream, and each time to warn me of danger, and dream though it is I heed that warning as I would an order from my colonel."

"I do not wonder at it, Surgeon Powell."

"And last night, Lord Lonsfield, I did not have the nightmare, as you and Sir John had, but I saw this same apparition in a dream, and strange to say it was not a warning I received!"

"Indeed?"

All were interested to know regarding this strange haunting form of a dead friend appearing only in dreams to the man who had taken his life.

"I saw the form as before," resumed Surgeon Powell.

"And instead of the usual warning came the words:

"Stick to the Blind Trail, Frank, do not give it up, nor let Cody do so, for there is an end to every trail."

"I awoke as before, and I discovered that the vision was not a reality, but a dream."

"And you will stick to the Blind Trail, Surgeon Powell?"

"Most assuredly, I will, Lord Lonsfield, lead me where it may," was the determined answer of the Surgeon Scout and those who knew him best were certain that nothing but death could alter his determination.

After some further conversation upon the subject it was decided that Buffalo Bill should go to Overland Station to see Boss Bill, the wagon-maker of the Goldhurst train to Mohave Valley, and upon his return arrangements should be made for a start to the scene where Granger Goldhurst had made his home.

"Start to-morrow night, Bill, for in the morning you know, you are entered in the shooting match for the Officers' Prizes for rifle and revolver shots, and firing from horseback, and Lord Lonsfield, you and Sir John are eligible allow me to add, so enter the lists," Captain Taylor said.

"Thank you, captain: what do you say, Sir John?"

"We can but try for the prize, my lord," was the answer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TRAPPER DENNIS.

"But pardon me, gentlemen, for we have gotten from the reality to dreams, and you have not heard Trapper Dennis's story," said Surgeon Powell.

"Yes, Cody, we must hear the old trapper's story," Lord Lonsfield added.

"By all means, for you say it referred indirectly to Granger Goldhurst," rejoined Sir John Reeder.

"Well, gentlemen, in listening to the Surgeon Scout's story I had forgotten all about old Dennis, for I happen to know that Doc Powell has taken certain trails I could not account for, and

for which he would only give me the reason that he had been warned not to do so.

"The secret is out now."

"And now to the story of old Dennis, Bill," said Surgeon Powell, as though anxious to change the subject of conversation from his dreams.

"Well, Doc, you heard as well as I what he said, and if I get off the trail chip in and lead me back again.

"We were in camp, as I said, gentlemen, for the night, when Surgeon Powell came in and joined us.

"I was very glad, for old Dennis was bluer than indigo at giving up his trapping life, that being his last night in the valley.

"We had encamped upon a hill in the valley, and which looked like the crater of a defunct volcano, though it was as fertile as a garden, had an icy spring bubbling up in it, and plenty of timber for firewood.

"Surgeon Powell had seen our smoke or would not have found us that night.

"We had plenty of game, some camp biscuits, coffee and bacon, so enjoyed a good supper and old Dennis began to talk, for we encouraged him to get all the information we could out of him about Mr. Goldhurst.

"Whether the encouragement we gave him led him to lie you must be the judges, but he drew pretty strong on us, did he not, Doc?"

"Yes, Bill, but the old fellow looked sincere."

"That is the trouble with most liars, men and women, they look innocent when they are furthest from the truth.

"But you shall have the trapper's story and judge for yourselves.

"He said that he had taken a great fancy to Miner Goldhurst, and it made him very sad when he came back to the scenes after the massacre.

"His first night in the valley he was very nervous, and camped on the hilltop where we were then.

"He had not gone to sleep for a long while, and when he did so he dreamt that he saw Miner Goldhurst by his side, and heard him say:

"Dennis, this valley is not safe now to living beings, it is sacred to the dead; but you are an honest man, as I know, and should you come here each year to trap, and get into trouble with the red-skins, just hoist a signal upon the lightning-seared limb of that tall tree, and aid will come to you.

"You have been drinking, Dennis, and are not now conscious of what I am saying, though I hope for your sake you are.

"Give up drinking, Dennis, and be a man, and remember what I tell you to-night."

"Dennis told us that he had been drinking before he went to bed, and supposed that he was half-drunk; but he saw the face and form of the speaker plainly in the firelight, and thought it real, until he awoke in the morning and found it a dream.

"He was considerably startled at first, but there stood the tall tree, with one limb standing upright above the others, like a flag-pole, and leafless.

"His first act was to swear off, and he has never taken a drink since, which is open to doubt.

"But the proof of the apparition coming to him in his dream came a few days later, he said.

"He determined to make that hill his camp, so he arranged a comfortable wicky-up, gathered a lot of wood, and arranged for a long stay.

"Then he went out on the stream and set his traps.

"The round he made each day was about twenty miles, and at night he was tired, and slept without dreaming, so he saw the apparition no more.

"But one afternoon, when about to start from his last trap homeward, he was surprised by an arrow whizzing over his head from across the river.

"Old Dennis was game, and meant to fight it out with the one who shot the arrow, until a dozen more came dangerously near, when he started for his camp on a jump.

"The Indians gave a yell, and this told him there were a dozen or more of them, and he fairly flew, for he knew that they had to ride a mile up to a ford, and then down the bank around a ridge to come in pursuit; giving him a start of two miles in a four-mile run.

"He was fleet of foot, and reached his camp, hiding among the rocks while the Indians were yet over a mile away.

"He counted sixteen of them, and gave himself up for lost, when his dream came to his mind.

"Instantly he climbed up the tree and attached to the bare limb his red blanket, and got down in time to take position to stand off the red-skins.

"They came charging up the hill, but he dropped two and the others retreated.

"They tried it again, and lost another warrior.

"Then they waited for night, and Dennis gave himself up for lost, when, just as they were creeping upon him a white form appeared

in the moonlight, a wild cry was heard, followed by shots, and the Indians fled, the strange form flying in pursuit.

"And in that white-robed form Dennis recognized the one of his dream, Miner Goldhurst.

"In the morning he discovered that two of the three dead Indians had been scalped.

"Such was his story, gentlemen, so draw your own conclusions," and Buffalo Bill smiled in a way that showed he took the story *cum grano salis*.

CHAPTER XIX. A FAIR WITNESS.

SOON after the story of Trapper Dennis, told by Buffalo Bill, Captain Taylor, Surgeon Powell and the scout took their leave, and the two Englishmen were left to their own meditations.

In spite of the strange story of the old trapper it made an impression upon them, as did the dream of the Surgeon Scout.

"I tell you, Lucien, there is something in all this," said Sir John, calling Lord Lonsdel by his Christian name as they each did when alone, for besides being kinsmen they had been firm friends from boyhood, though the nobleman was several years the senior of the baronet.

"Yes, this is a land of mysteries and of mysterious people, and I believe I am becoming superstitious, John.

"But with you I think we are on Granger's track, or rather those remarkable men are, Cody and Powell.

"Of course all we have heard convinces me, as it does you, that the man referred to was none other than Granger.

"But this family I do not understand."

"Nor can I account for it, Lucien."

"Then it carries us back ten years or so, since which time nothing has been heard of Granger."

"True, and even if dead, he seems to have no grave."

"Nor have his family."

"If we could track him to a grave, I believe we could identify the body with the aid of Surgeon Powell, for you remember that Granger was wounded in the side in India, the bullet passing directly through a rib and not breaking it?"

"Yes, and he had broken his left leg when a boy, and his left arm had been shattered by a bullet in Africa, so the distinguishing marks about him would show."

"Well, we must find him dead or alive, for if a prisoner to the Sioux he must be rescued."

"By all means, as also any of his family, for I am not one to take a title or estate unless I am the only and direct claimant, Lucien."

"Well, I know that, John, and his marriage would invalidate your claim, so we must get at the truth."

"We certainly must and will, for those who aid us are most deeply interested in our mission, and are the very ones to help us."

"They are indeed, only we cannot pay for their services, for Surgeon Powell gave me a hint that Buffalo Bill would be offended if offered payment by us, which plainly meant that if the scout would not accept gold, to offer it to him, Powell, would be an insult."

"But we can make them some handsome gift to remember us?"

"Ah yes, we can do that; but now about this shoot to-morrow?"

"I have heard the officers discussing it, and it is open to officers, and their guests, so we are in."

"There is a gold-hilted sword for the best revolver-shot on horseback, a pair of gold-mounted revolvers for the quickest fired and best six shots with a revolver, and a silver-mounted rifle for shooting off hand at close and long range, all having appropriate inscriptions on them."

"Do the ladies shoot?"

"You cannot back these American women down in anything."

"Then we must not back down."

"No indeed, for both of us are considered dead shots with both rifle and revolver, you know."

"Well, let us go for a ride and practice a little with both weapons," and mounting their horses they rode away over the prairie, leaving behind them the cracking of rifles and revolvers, showing that others in the fort were on the ranges practicing for the tournament upon the morrow.

Seeking a clump of timber under a cliff they began to practice, and kept it up for an hour or more with excellent results.

As they turned to mount their horses and return they heard a voice as from the clouds call out:

"Most excellent marksmanship, gentlemen."

They looked quickly upward and there, upon the cliff, mounted on her buffalo-hunting horse, was Bessie Bond.

The two Englishmen were slightly nonplused, but at once raised their hats, while Bessie Bond called out:

"You will find a trail up the hill yonder around the cliff, if you care to join me."

"With pleasure, Miss Bond," answered Lord Lonsfield, and the two at once set off in a sally for the steep path.

Bessie Bond never looked more lovely than she did then, in her dark-blue habit, trimmed with silver braid and a scarlet plume falling below the brim of her black slouch hat.

"She is certainly a most beautiful woman," muttered the nobleman as they advanced toward her.

"She is indeed," was Sir John's response in the same undertone.

The maiden stretched forth her gloved hand to each as they rode up, and said:

"Pardon an eavesdropper, but I heard shots under the cliff, so came to investigate.

"You are both splendid shots, and that alone would win the hearts of our bordermen, not to speak of your many other virtues."

Was this sarcasm, both men asked themselves. They had done fine shooting, but could she not beat them?

And then as to their many other virtues? They however bowed in silence, and asked to escort the young lady to the fort, if she was going thither.

"No, I am going home, having been off on a jaunt all alone, as is my wont; but if you will escort me to Ranch Isle I will be glad to have you do so, as will my mother be to have you call."

This was an honor they had not expected, for they had heard that no one was ever invited to Ranch Isle, so they accepted with pleasure, "if Miss Bond would excuse their being in riding suits."

CHAPTER XX.

A BORDER GIRL AT HOME.

THE two Englishmen had ceased to wonder at what an American girl dared do, and when they found Bessie Bond miles away from home on the plains, they made no comment.

One upon each side of her they rode homeward with her, and noted her perfect poise in the saddle, her thorough control of her spirited horse, and that she had her rifle swung at her saddle-horn and a revolver in her belt.

She also carried a lariat tied to her saddle cantle so that it could be gotten ready for use at any moment.

She chatted gayly as she rode along, was very witty, commented upon the life she led, made able criticisms upon the management of the Indians, giving the Englishmen a rap at England's treatment of her semi-barbarian races, and altogether showed herself a woman of wonderful information.

Why they had been honored by an invitation to Ranch Isle they could only explain by thinking that it was because they were strangers.

They had heard of Buffalo Bill's going there, but then the scout had saved the life of Bessie Bond on one occasion, when corraled by Indians.

Then, too, Mustang Madge had several times dropped in there without an invitation, once to escape a rain-storm, another time to exchange a lame horse for a fresh one, and a third time by invitation.

Coming in view of the ranch, the Englishmen regarded it with interest, for they had a great desire to see just how such a woman lived, a woman of intellect, refinement, and yet one who had the stamp of the wild border girl upon her as well.

"Your home is well protected, Miss Bond," said Lord Lonsfield, taking in the sweep of the river swiftly flowing, and showing a horseshoe bend, with precipitous banks upon the ranch side.

"Yes, we need fear a raid only from the neck of land, and our cowboys camp there.

"Then, too, the trail across has eddies on either side, with dangerous whirlpools, and only this narrow strip to cross on, as you see.

"There is our cowboy camp," and she pointed to a log cabin with a broad piazza running across the front, and where several cowboys were seated, with half a dozen horses staked out in the rear.

Seeing their approach, one of the cowboys arose and opened a gate, which the Englishmen noted was made of heavy logs, some ten feet long, and closely put together, while it rolled back on rollers, and when closed formed a solid breastwork six feet in height, connecting with a stockade wall ten feet high, and running into the river on either side of the neck of land.

There was a rise of land just there, so that half a dozen men at the gate could keep back half a hundred readily.

The cowboy, a tall, bronzed-faced fellow fully armed, saluted Bessie Bond politely, but paid no more attention to the two Englishmen than if they were not with her.

She returned the salute and rode on toward the cabin, situated half a mile back from the gate, and upon a rise, which commanded an extensive view.

Around upon the meadow lands grazed many cattle and a herd of ponies, while situated in the timber as it was, with vegetable and flower gardens fenced in, and hot-houses, there was an air of comfort upon all the visitors did not expect to find.

The cabin consisted of six rooms, large, and with a thirty feet wide hall running its length, while the front and back had a broad piazza.

Upon one side were the sleeping and sitting-room, and upon the other a library, dining-room and kitchen, there being no accommodations for guests.

Mrs. Bond arose and welcomed the visitors, with no apparent surprise at the daughter bringing them home, or regret at her privacy being broken in upon.

They were ushered into the library where they saw books they had not expected to find except in a scholar's possession.

A piano was there, a guitar also and a cornet, while the walls were adorned with pencil and pen and ink sketches, and paintings in oil and water colors. Upon all there was an air of perfect refinement, and the two English officers were surprised and pleased at the chance to behold the home of Bessie Bond the Border Beauty, as the soldiers alliteratively called her.

Refreshments were served, and a glass of rare old wine with them, and to the surprise of the visitors Bessie rolled some Mexican cigarettes and offered them to them.

After a pleasant visit at the ranch they arose to go, but no invitation to call again was extended.

They passed the cowboys' camp, were let through the massive gate by the same man who had admitted them, and whom they found it impossible to draw into a conversation.

Then they started for the fort at a gallop, for it was growing late, and they followed the trail they had been directed to take by the fair rancher.

As they neared the fort they saw Mustang Madge coming toward them.

"Well, gentlemen, I heard of your going and non-appearance, so was going out to look you up, for there is danger in a stranger going far from the fort.

"I sent word to Surgeon Powell reporting your long stay, and he will be after you with a squad of cavalry or scouts before long.

"If he was only an officer I did not like, I would lead you by a trail that would give him a night's work of it to find you," and the young girl's eyes twinkled with merriment at the thought.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FAIR GUIDE.

LORD LONSFIELD and Sir John thanked Mustang Madge most warmly for her interest in their behalf, and saw that there was alarm felt for their long stay by beholding Surgeon Powell and four scouts coming along the trail.

"It is so easy to get lost in this country, to one who does not know it, and especially after nightfall, while there are a lawless lot about who would be only too ready to kill you for your watches and what else of value they might get," Madge explained.

"Now, if an English woman were to do such a thing as this American girl has done, we would feel that she was in love with one or the other of us," thought Lord Lonsfield.

"Well, give an account of yourselves, please?" said Madge.

"Were you really lost?"

"No, we went out to practice shooting, Miss Madge."

"Was your success sufficient to allow you to take part to-morrow in the match?"

"We shall enter."

"Bravo! then I shall get a chance to down the British lions."

"You seem very confident of victory over us, Miss Madge."

"I shall do my best, though I dread Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, for they do not believe in allowing a girl to win from sheer politeness, where you, Lord Lonsfield, and Sir John Reeder might."

"Not a bit of it, for we will do our best."

"Then may the best man win," laughed Madge, while Sir John said:

"You do not appear to dread Miss Bond."

"Ah! she will enter certainly, for she is game."

"But though a crack shot she is spasmodic, and shoots according to her humor."

"Were Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell to do that they would have been killed long ago."

"May I ask how Miss Bond shoots by humors?"

"Yes, my lord, she will shoot for dead center every time if feeling in the humor to do so; but if rattled she will keep her bullets as persistently out of the bull's-eye; but I know two John Bull's-Eyes she may hit!" and Madge laughed wickedly.

"And does Miss Madge allow her humor to govern her shooting?"

"Not in the least, Sir John, for I am always the same."

"Coquette?"

"Why shouldn't a woman be a coquette, for it is her prerogative to make herself fascinating."

"Let her be a boor and see how the men will scamper from her side."

"I agree with you, Miss Madge; but shall I tell you where we have been?"

"If you please, for if you do not I can strike your trail to-morrow and find out."

"Ah! I forgot that trailing was one of your many accomplishments."

"I trail as I flirt, naturally."
 "It is no effort; but let me tell you where you have been?"
 "Where?"
 "To Ranch Isle."
 "How do you know?"
 "I am a Yankee and guessed it."
 "You are right."
 "Did you get in?"
 "Oh yes, we were invited there by Miss Bond, whom we met, for she was secretly watching our practice."
 "Well, you were honored, my lord; but they have a lovely home, though they keep it wholly for themselves."
 "I only wish that Bessie would come out of her shell more, though of late she has improved in that respect."
 "But here comes Surgeon Powell and his scouts to look you up."
 Just then Surgeon Powell and his scouts rode up, and the former called out:
 "I see you have lassoed them, Miss Madge?"
 "Yes, I roped them in back on the prairie yonder, Doctor Powell."
 "I am glad that you did, for after night even bordermen get lost in this country."
 "That is why I came after you, my lord, with my men, when Miss Madge reported that you had been absent from the fort for hours."
 "I thank you, Surgeon Powell, but we were on our way to the fort when Miss Madge met us."
 "Nonsense; you were on a trail which would have taken you into the country of The Deserters, for they had taken the left hand at the Crossing, doctor."
 "Yes, that would never have brought you to the fort."
 "I admit that we did turn to the left, but supposed that we were following the instructions given us by Miss Bond."
 "No, you misunderstood her, for that trail would have led you into trouble most surely."
 "I am glad Miss Madge headed you off, for after nightfall we could not have followed your trail."
 Both Lord Lonsfield and Sir John saw by the manner of the Surgeon Scout, his men and Madge, that they were going wholly wrong when the maiden had headed them off, and they felt grateful to her for her coming, for had she not ridden out alone ahead of the scouts, after sending a report of the long absence of the Englishmen, they would have been missed by the searchers, who would not have been able to follow them after dark.
 So they were profuse in their thanks, and while Lord Lonsfield rode ahead with Doctor Powell, Sir John accompanied Madge, the scouts following, and all going at a gallop for the fort.
 The sun had set and darkness settled down before they reached Fort Beauvoir, when Colonel Loyal lectured the truants upon going off alone on the plains, and explained the great danger in their doing so, as he said:
 "The Sioux constantly have scouts about, and The Deserters spies, ever ready to pick off any one they can, not to speak of getting lost."
 "And yet Miss Madge and Miss Bond go alone over the prairies, colonel."
 "True, but they are skilled in border craft, avoid every rock, tree or bush, and avoid a danger, which you, as strangers, cannot, while they also know the country thoroughly."
 "We stand reproved, sir, and will do so no more," said Lord Lonsfield, pleasantly.

CHAPTER XXII.

EMERALD ED.

On the way back to the fort, Surgeon Powell said to Lord Lonsfield:
 "I have arranged a little plan for you to-night which will give you an insight into a new phase of border life."
 "Captain Taylor is officer of the day, so cannot go, but Onderdonk will accompany us, and also will Buffalo Bill, so you will get a chance to see the prairie tiger and tigress in their lair."
 "Ah! a hunt by night then?"
 "We shall certainly enjoy it."
 "No, you misunderstand me, for we will be the hunted ones."
 "Indeed?"
 "To be more explicit, you have not met all of our characters at the post yet."
 "I rather like those I have met."
 "But these are of a different kind, for we will go over to the settlement to-night, among the sovereign people, where you will meet settlers, cowboys, scouts, soldiers, trappers, trainmen and in fact all of the dwellers in and about a frontier post."
 "We will be delighted, for I speak for Sir John as well as myself."
 "The place I speak of is a gambling saloon, occupying an acre in space, under a shanty roofs and walls, and where several hundred men congregate at times, on a good night for playing, that is when money is plentiful after pay-day."
 "And are not disturbances the result of such gatherings, doctor?"
 "Oh, yes, indeed, for from one to three men

turn up their toes, as we call being killed out here, on such nights."

"And the law?"
 "The law is mighty generous here, and the military is here to watch the Indian and the outlaw, but cannot interfere in civil life."

"Of course Colonel Loyal takes a firm stand, and assumes authority when matters go too far, but he has to keep within certain bounds, and the lawless element rule the frontiers."

"Such a place is a study, and I wished to have you and Sir John witness the scenes enacted there."

"Nothing would gratify us more, for we have seen a good deal of life in our lives, though of course not on the American frontier; but will Colonel Loyal approve of our going?"

"Oh, yes, for he has looked in himself on several occasions when the gamblers were carrying too high a hand, and it had a salutary effect each time, for the colonel is a man to stand no nonsense."

"And who is the head spirit of this gambling quarter?"

"The place is known as the 'Devil's Acre,' and most properly so."

"That name is emblazoned upon a large black sign, upon which is painted a Mephisto in scarlet, holding a horn of plenty in one hand from which are falling gold-pieces into outstretched hands, white, red, black and yellow, for there is no distinction there, as you will see whites, negroes, Chinese and Indians gambling."

"In his other hand Mephisto holds a pack of cards, and beneath is the legend:

"EMERALD ED, PROPRIETOR."

"The sign is really an artistic piece of work, executed by a soldier who was awaiting execution for killing an officer, and who gave the money paid him for the work by Emerald Ed to treat the boys in the Devil's Acre the night following his death."

"Was this done?"
 "Most faithfully was it carried out."

"And Emerald Ed?"
 "Is, in border parlance, a dandy."

"May I ask an interpretation?"
 "He is a man six feet in height, of heavy build, possessing curling blonde locks that fall to his waist, and a beard equally as long and waving."

"He has intensely black eyes, and wicked ones too when aroused, and dresses in a stylish black suit, frock coat buttoned close, patent-leather shoes and a high hat."

"He has a belt of arms strapped about his waist, and the revolvers and knife are gold-mounted, and each set with a large and splendid emerald, a match to one in his belt buckle, and in a ring upon the little finger of his left hand."

"After nightfall he appears in his saloon, and he departs before dawn, no one ever seeing him by day, for then he sleeps."

"He lives in a cabin back of his saloon, and close under a cliff, and has a Chinaman as a servant, a giant in size, and one who cannot be bulldozed, for he is as plucky a man as I ever saw."

"Like master like man, I suppose?"
 "Oh, yes, for Emerald Ed's worst foe would never accuse him of being aught but a brave man."

"He is said to hail from Texas, and to have left a red trail there."

"And has made his mark here?"
 "He has killed several men, but somehow always has right on his side."

"He possesses great strength, and stands no nonsense, while he always prevents a row in his saloon if possible."

"Courteous to all he is particularly so to the officers and soldiers, never allows a card-sharp to cheat them if he can prevent it, and is very generous, his hand being always extended to help any one in distress."

"Altogether he is a very wonderful man, and though I do not admire him, I do not dislike him, for there are many worse men who make a business of professing virtues they never had."

"We shall take real delight in seeing this Emerald Ed, and I do not mind losing a small sum to him to become better acquainted with him."

"Emerald Ed never plays, sir, only watches the games; but you will have a chance to risk your money with another who is the presiding genius of the place."

"And who is he?"
 "It is a woman, Lord Lonsfield, and she is known as Keno Kate, and the Faro Fairy, and she too is a mystery of whom I will give you a description."

"What a land! and what a people!" cried Lord Lonsfield, with real admiration in voice and manner.

CHAPTER XXIII.

KENO KATE.

"THE nomenclature of the border strikes me as being something very extraordinary, as well as entertaining, Doctor Powell," said Lord Lonsfield, as they rode on together.

"Yes; it is a product of the Far West, and peculiar to the country, the names of the people."

"Indians name a child, brave or woman from

some peculiarity about them, or from some happening on the day of their birth, and this may have been the basis of the names given by those who associate with the red-skins, or fight them, for we have Buffalo Bill, Texas Jack, Wild Bill, Dashing Charlie, Deadwood Dick, all noted scouts, while there are Ribbon Rob, Silk Rein Sam, Four-in-Hand Frank, all famous stage drivers, with Dandy Dick, Deadly Dan, Bowie Bill, Revolver Ralph, Rifle Nick, Sporting Charlie, Keno Kit, Velvet Bill and Emerald Ed, well known sports."

"Then come the outlaw bands from Utah to the mouth of the Rio Grande, which are known as Red Buzzard, Black Bravos, Border Road-Agents, Toll-Takers, and The Deserters."

"Even the border women do not escape, as we have Hallelujah Sallie, Salvation Jane, Calamity Jane, Wild Nellie, Card Queen Kate, Keno Kate, and others, while you know that both Miss Bond and Miss Madge are nicknamed."

"Yes, it is truly wonderful, and I shall write down the names you have mentioned to inscribe in my book of Treasures upon my return."

"But now about this genius of the Devil's Acre, Keno Kate you called her."

"Yes, she is as odd as is Emerald Ed."

"Some suppose her to be the wife of Emerald Ed, and yet no one knows for certain."

"She certainly came to the settlement before he did, and dealt faro at the saloon, which was then not as large as it is now."

"What kind of a woman is she, doctor?"
 "In appearance, a lady."

"She is tall, inclined to be a full figure, and has jet black hair and eyes, as far as the latter can be judged, for she wears a half mask, which, however, reveals a small, exquisitely shaped mouth with perfect teeth."

"She dresses in black velvet, close fitting, and wears only rubies as jewelry, and fine ones, too."

"She has earrings, a necklace, two bracelets and a superb solitaire all of rubies, worth a small fortune, while in her hair is stuck a small dagger as a pin, but which is, or can be made serviceable if needed."

"Upon her hips are revolvers ready for use, stuck in a sash, not a belt, and she has shown that she knows how to handle them, for she shot a desperado one night in the very center of the forehead, and when he was firing at her, too, because she accused him of cheating, which he was doing."

"She speaks in the lowest of voices, never gets rattled, and deals cards like a professional gambler."

"Like Emerald Ed, she is never seen by day, appearing about ten o'clock from no one knows where, and disappearing after a stay of four hours in which she coins money, for she plays to win."

"She seldom speaks to Emerald Ed, or he to her, and yet they must be partners, for he is always near the rear door to protect her retreat when she takes her departure."

"The boys call her, as I said, the Faro Fairy and Keno Kate, but she appears to prefer the latter name."

"She is without doubt a woman of education, and one who was reared in refinement, whatever she may be now."

"And she presides there every night to victimize those who dare play against her?"
 "Oh no, she plays a fair game, as no one can detect any unfairness in her methods."

"Then she is not a nightly frequenter of the place, coming and going at will, though she never misses a night following pay-day, so she will be on hand to-night."

"I am glad of that, for I would not miss seeing this Faro Fairy Keno Kate for a great deal, and, in playing with her I shall have a chance to study her."

"Then too I am charmed with your description of Emerald Ed and shall cultivate him, for I feel very much like writing a book upon American frontier life."

"It would doubtless be a truthful tale, Lord Lonsfield, something we cannot say for the works of our English cousins about us, for they are inclined to be prejudiced, see things through smoked glasses, and because we are different from English people think we are uncouth and worse."

"I have observed that in all books I have read written by my countrymen and Frenchmen upon the United States."

"From what I have seen they have set out to tell untruths, too envious to tell the truth of your wonderful progress, refinement, pluck and talents."

"I think I shall call my book 'John Bull in the Wild West.'"

"A good title, sir, but I hope you will speak of other than the Wild West, or else none of your countrymen will see it to be a true story of all of the United States."

"A point well taken, doctor, and which I shall remember; but here we are at the fort, and I really have to thank you and that lovely young guide, Miss Madge, that Sir John and I are not to spend the night on the plains, perhaps worse."

"They had now entered the stockade, and having escorted Madge by her home rode over to their own quarters, where Colonel Loyal lec-

tured them, as has been seen, upon their imprudence.

The two Englishmen had gotten up an excellent appetite by their long ride, and joined the colonel at dinner, after which they adjourned to their quarters to change their clothes for some that would be more fitting a visit to the gambling establishment of Emerald El and the Faro Fairy.

Lord Lonsfield had told Sir John Reeder all about the intended trip for the night, and that gentleman had entered into it with the same zest as had his companion.

They were hardly more than ready when Surgeon Powell called for them, accompanied by Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk.

Buffalo Bill was to meet them at the Devil's Acre, the Surgeon Scout said, and as it was nearly ten o'clock the party of four departed, passing out of the fort by giving the countersign to the sentinel and thence on foot the mile or more to the settlement in one end of which, at the base of a wild and rugged cliff, the gambling saloon was situated.

CHAPTER XXIV. AT THE DEVIL'S ACRE.

FOR purposes which perhaps he understood better than any one else, Emerald El, the gambler, had located his saloon in a retired part of the settlement.

It was in a crescent-like corner of the cliff, in a pack of heavy timber, and a stockade wall ran across from each corner of the shanty to the rocks.

Along this wall were rings for the hitching of horses, and sometimes the rings were not numerous enough to hold out on good evenings for gambling.

There was a cabin back of the saloon where the gambler dwelt with his man-of-all-work, Chow-Chow the giant Chinese who served as valet, cook and guard over his master's domain, as well as hostler, for the gambler kept some good horses, though if he rode out it was by night.

There was a vast crowd at Devil's Acre the night Surgeon Powell escorted the Englishmen there, as could be seen by the horses hitched without.

Near the door they were met by Buffalo Bill, who said to Surgeon Powell:

"I sent some of my boys over to be on hand, should there be trouble."

"A wise precaution, at least, Bill, for no one knows what may happen on pay-night here."

"Perhaps you had better not join us, but keep aloof, at least for awhile."

"It would be better, I think," assured the scout, and the party passed on to the shanty.

Throwing open the door, Surgeon Powell led the way in, followed by Lord Lonsfield, while Sir John came with Lieutenant Onderdonk.

The popularity of the Surgeon Scout with all was at once demonstrated, for as he was recognized a wild, uproarious cheer went up for:

"Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout!"

The doctor raised his sombrero politely, and moved on through the saloon.

The sight that greeted the eyes of the Englishmen was one they had never seen before.

There was full an acre under one roof, and it was built of boards stood on end, ten feet high, and posts supporting a roof of boards.

There were some hundred tables in the vast space, over each one of which hung a lamp, with a reflector casting its rays downward.

At each table sat from two to four men, and along the walls and around the posts were benches for others to sit upon.

A broad aisle extended up the center, with narrower ones between the tables, and in the rear was a platform upon which was a faro-table, another with a wheel of fortune, and a second table for the throwing of dice.

Over these three tables presided Keno Kate, going from one to the other at her own sweet will, and replacing the man in charge.

In the rear of the three was the bar, extending across the room, and behind which stood half a dozen tenders, for there was no need of more, as mixed drinks were not served, every man taking whisky, and drinking it straight, for water was seldom furnished unless asked for.

The man who would have the temerity there to ask for a "brandy smash," "whisky cocktail," or "gin sling," would have a fight or a foot-race on his hands at once.

There were all of four hundred people in the saloon when the surgeon's party entered, and the Englishmen beheld bearded trappers, miners, cowboys, ranchers, settlers, negroes who were servants at the fort, and negro soldiers as well, Chinese, Indians in their picturesque garb, Mexicans who had driven cattle up from the lower country, and a large smattering of Boys in Blue, anxious either to increase their pay or lose it, in either of which cases they would be content.

In such a gathering, of course, there must be a number of desperadoes, hunted men, fugitives from home and law, and who had stained their whole lives with crime.

There were many, too, brave and noble fellows of all classes, who perhaps had the sin of gambling alone to contend against.

Up the central aisle passed the Surgeon Scout in a free and easy way, Lord Lonsfield by his side, and behind came the lieutenant and Sir John.

Here and there the surgeon spoke a word pleasantly to someone he knew well, a soldier, cowboy, settler or negro, and from all had a cordial greeting.

His quick eyes had taken in at a glance that there were a number of scouts there as well as soldiers, and he passed on to the platform where Keno Kate sat in all the glory of her exalted position, for men regarded her with wonder, admiration, a certain awe and commingled feelings.

The eyes of the Englishmen were upon her as they advanced, and they beheld her near the center table, the faro bank.

She was seated in an easy-chair, idly watching the dealer as he dealt the cards.

She was a woman to command notice, admiration it might be, for her form was tall, elegant, and, as she rose, dignified and queenly, for she arose as the surgeon advanced with his friends.

Her black velvet dress was fitted close to her form, up to the neck, where her necklace of rubies was clasped.

Her half-masked face was turned upon the four who approached her, and her eyes seemed taking them in to her own satisfaction.

As Surgeon Powell came near her she extended her hand and said:

"Good-evening Doctor Powell; this is an honor I seldom enjoy, to see you here."

She spoke in a very low, sweet voice, and the surgeon responded:

"I came to present my friends, Keno Kate, Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, who are guests of Colonel Loyal."

"Your friends are ever welcome, Surgeon Powell," and Keno Kate offered her hand to each visitor in a manner very winning.

CHAPTER XXV.

A FAIR GAMBLER.

THE half-mask of the Faro Fairy was provoking to all who gazed upon her, the Englishmen particularly.

The part of the face that was visible was perfect in feature, though the complexion was dark, almost an olive, in keeping with her jet-black hair, wound in heavy braids about her haughty head.

Had she hidden her face thus far on account of some hideous birth-mark, scar or deformity? Or had she hidden it because it was a face it would not do to recognize?

That she had done so implied to thinking minds that she either was disfigured or a fugitive from justice, and who dared not have her identity revealed.

A strange, mysterious, beautiful-looking creature she was, young and defiant, haughty yet gentle in manner unless aroused.

She appeared to the Englishmen like a tamed tigress they had seen in India, as soft and purring as a house cat, unless they were thwarted, and then as savage as if in their native jungles.

"This is your first visit West, Lord Lonsfield, I believe?" she said in the same low-voiced way which seemed natural to her.

"Yes, madam, and I must say that I am charmed with your Wild West, if it be so that you claim it as your country?"

"Oh, yes, I am a border woman, and what perhaps you have never met before, a gambler."

"Yes, I have seen fair gamblers before."

"Thanks for the compliment implied; but then I believe English ladies do gamble considerably?"

"Yes, they bet on cards, and on horse-races as well."

"I have seen at Hamburg an English lady of rank sit at a table and lose ten thousand pounds in an afternoon."

"She was an inveterate gambler, and yet was a devoted church member, gave alms to the poor and did a great deal of good, when she won, with her money."

"And when she lost?"

"Then she became mean and penurious until luck came her way again."

"Eventually, however, she swamped her fortune, her husband's followed, and she, rather than live a poor woman, calmly took her own life."

"I wonder if that will be my fate?" said the gambler thoughtfully, and she winced under Lord Lonsfield's response:

"Quien sabe?"

The cool shrug of his shoulders, too, impressed her, and she said, as though to drown unpleasant thoughts with action:

"Do you play, my Lord Lonsfield?"

"Oh, yes, to a limited amount."

"And your friend, Sir John Reeder?"

"Plays also, as I do."

"Then I shall be pleased to play against you both."

"Ah! you have confidence in your luck?"

"Perfect."

As she spoke a cheer rose over the room as some one called out:

"Here comes Buffalo Bill, pards!"

* Who knows?

Glancing toward the door there was seen the tall, elegant form of the scout sauntering carelessly into the saloon.

He raised his sombrero at the cheer given him and Keno Kate said:

"There is a man of luck, Lord Lonsfield?"

"Who do you mean, madam?"

"Buffalo Bill."

"Is he lucky at cards?"

"At everything."

"He is a wonderful man, I think."

"As is also the friend who brought you here."

"Surgeon Powell?"

"Yes, there is a dignity, a reserve power about the man I always admire."

"Do you know I think in manners you are very much alike?"

"You think so?"

"I do."

"I consider it a compliment to have you say so; but speaking of Buffalo Bill, if he goes on a trail he gets to the end of it no matter what the obstacles in the way; if his life is threatened woe be unto the man who threatens, if he plays cards he always wins, in fact he was born under a lucky star."

"As you were, madam."

"Try and see if I was," came the bantering reply.

"I am ready."

"Shall it be your friend and yourself against me?"

"If so you wish."

"I so wish."

"Come, Sir John, our fair gambler here is to test her luck against us both, so be on your mettle as an Englishman," called out Lord Lonsfield, calling to Sir John Reeder who, was talking apart with Surgeon Powell, while he was watching the woman.

"I shall be most happy, though two against one, and that one a woman is hardly fair," said Sir John.

"It is as I wish, sir, and remember in placing your stakes upon a card there is no limit for you, though I shall not run over a hundred dollars, it being a bank rule."

"If either of you win I pay the sum to both, and if either lose I take from both."

"I agree, madam," Lord Lonsfield said, while Sir John remarked:

"I am wholly at your service, madam."

Then the woman picked up the pack while the two Englishmen staked fifty each upon their respective cards.

With the nimble fingers of an expert, Keno Kate dealt the cards, while all near gazed eagerly on.

"You win, my lord, so I pay both," and she handed over the money.

Again Lord Lonsfield won, this time with a hundred staked on his card.

Without any sign of caring for her loss the woman again handed over the money to both, and Lord Lonsfield after a word to Sir John left all of his winnings upon the same card.

Sir John did the same, and coolly the woman dealt, to once more lose.

"Come! I cannot play against a woman when she loses," said Lord Lonsfield, and he added:

"We withdraw from the game, madam."

CHAPTER XXVI.

HIS SATANIC HIGHNESS AT HOME.

"You will certainly not withdraw without giving me a chance to get my revenge?" calmly said the fair gambler.

"Call the game off, madam, leaving the money with the bank."

"No, Lord Lonsfield, I will not accept your generous offer, so demand three more games."

"As you please, madam, for we can but yield."

"Do you leave the stakes now on the cards as your bets?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

The woman shuffled calmly, dealt the cards and lost.

She did not change countenance, however, and the Englishmen did not remove their stakes.

Again Keno Kate dealt, and again lost.

"You are in luck, gentlemen; but do you still leave the money on the cards as the bet?"

"Certainly, and this is the last game."

She dealt in the same unmoved manner as before, and won.

"Let me see, I have won back my losses, and you each pay me five hundred dollars, I believe!"

"I warned you I was born under a lucky star."

Both Lord Lonsfield and Sir John handed over the money in an indifferent way, while the former said:

"Yes, you play a very remarkable game, madam, and one that must win, for as an expert in cards myself, I can see it."

The words were quietly uttered, and might appear like a compliment to many, but the face of the woman slightly changed color, and there was just a shadow of a tremor in her hand as she drew the money toward her.

"Now, I admire above all things a good game, and abhor one that is not perfectly square," continued Lord Lonsfield.

"It is a pleasure to me to watch your game,

Keno Kate, for I have learned something, and shall be tempted to play again, so must ask for the exact change for this bill of one thousand denomination."

He passed the bank-note over as he spoke, and Keno Kate's hand again slightly trembled as she took it.

She cast a look straight into his eyes, slipped the note in the drawer, and then said quietly:

"There were two bills, Lord Lonsfield, of a thousand each; do you wish smaller notes for both of them?"

"I do," and there was a decided emphasis in the two words uttered.

She took up the money and counted out just two thousand dollars.

"I thank you," he said and with a bow passed on, joined by Surgeon Powell who said in a whisper:

"You caught her cheating, though I did not detect it."

"Yes, she has two packs in that box."

"It was a clever trick, and she lost to catch us for a large sum; but she saw I had discovered her so changed that thousand dollar bill by giving me back the sum we had both lost."

"She is a woman of nerve and most devilishly clever."

"As you are also, my lord," laughed Surgeon Powell as they passed on.

"Thanks! I keep my eyes open, doctor, I admit; but is this Emerald Ed you told me of? for as a partner of that woman they must be birds of a feather."

"He never gambles, you know."

"Ah! leaves her deft fingers to do the clever work, eh?"

"Yes, it is safer, for a man caught cheating out here would surely depart this transitory life with his boots on."

"He has what we call in England, then, horse sense; but is he about?"

"Yes, he has just come into the room."

"Come we will head him off," and the surgeon led the way toward a man who had just entered.

He was a large, heavily-built man, clothed in black broad-cloth of a most stylish cut, and wearing a high hat.

He wore his blonde beard and hair long, and was a very striking looking individual.

His waist was encircled by an embroidered belt with a gold buckle representing a human eye, in the pupil of which was set a large emerald.

His gold-mounted revolver and knife also had an emerald set in the butt and hilt, while upon his left little finger sparkled a similar gem of great size and beauty.

"Ah, Doctor Powell, glad to see you here," he said in a deep voice and in a slow measured tone.

"I am here, Emerald Ed, with my friends, Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, to whom permit me to present you," assured the Surgeon Scout, and the gambler greeted the visitors in his stately, courteous way, while he said:

"And you, Lieutenant Onderdonk, I have not seen often of late in the Devil's Acre."

"No, Emerald Ed, I am laying up my treasures on earth now, rather than in the devil's dominion," was the reply.

"Good that, very, and nobody appreciates a witty *repartee* more than I do, even though it is a dead center shot at me."

"You must know, gentlemen," and he turned to the Englishmen, that this place is known as the Devil's Acre, and I am the proprietor here."

"But will you meet Keno Kate and play?"

"We have met her and played," was Lord Lonsfield's dry response.

"Then join me in a bottle of wine, for I have some here though you would only expect to get tanglefoot."

They accepted this invitation and sat down at a table near the bar, when one of the men brought a bottle of champagne, and the best, with glasses of the most delicate manufacture.

"To your queen, gentlemen, and her subjects, my guests," said Emerald Ed, in his courteous way, and doffing their hats the Englishmen in surprise drank the toast, for they had not expected to hear such an one in that place.

In response Lord Lonsfield said:

"To your President, sir, and your own good health."

And this toast was drank just as a chorus of voices rung out over by Keno Kate's table, and her voice was heard in a tone slightly raised now:

"Hold! do not harm him, for he shall answer to me personally for that insult!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN INSULT AVENGED.

EMERALD ED did not seem in the least disturbed by the chorus of angry voices, followed by the words of Keno Kate.

He coolly sipped his wine, not even glancing in the direction of the fair gambler's table around which a large crowd was now quickly assembling.

Surgeon Powell took it with equal coolness,

and Lieutenant Onderdonk was as provokingly as calm, to the two Englishmen, who rose quickly from their chairs.

"Be seated, gentlemen, for it is but a breeze that will soon blow over," said Emerald Ed.

"But your wife, sir, appears to be in trouble."

"If you refer to the lady card-dealer, Lord Lonsfield, she is able to take care of herself, and her name is Keno Kate the Faro Fairy, not Mrs. Emerald Ed."

"I beg pardon for a slip of the tongue, sir; but may she not need aid, for from appearances I should think so, and be a woman what she may, it is the duty of a man to protect her."

Before Emerald Ed could make reply a well-known voice was heard, and Surgeon Powell and Lieutenant Onderdonk quickly arose to their feet and moved toward the scene of excitement followed by the Englishmen.

"What is it, Cody?" asked Frank Powell, as he saw Buffalo Bill standing near the Faro Fairy.

"Permit me to explain, Doctor Powell," answered Keno Kate.

The surgeon bowed and the woman said:

"Barton Purdy has imbibed too much tanglefoot, and losing his money, sought revenge by kissing me, catching me unawares, while at the same time he sought to tear my mask off, and, but for Buffalo Bill, would have done so."

"Then he attempted to draw his revolver, when the crowd rushed upon him, and I demand that he answer to me for the insult, but Buffalo Bill says no, and the crowd wish to hang Purdy, but I say no."

"Very right in Buffalo Bill it is to say no, Keno Kate, for surely you do not wish to meet that man in an exchange of shots?" said Frank Powell, while the two Englishmen looked on with rapt attention.

"There would be no exchange of shots, only one, and I would fire that," was the very significant remark, and its pluck was greeted with a cheer.

"I'll take chances, Keno Kate, in your place, with Barton Purdy, as he holds me responsible for the trouble he has gotten into," said Buffalo Bill, and a cheer greeted these words.

"No, he insulted me, and I shall avenge myself, though I thank you, Buffalo Bill, so, Boston Purdy, choose your second, take your position, and report when you are ready, for I name Buffalo Bill as my second."

"Do you think I am such a fool as to fight a woman?" asked the man, a tall, loose jointed fellow, with a wicked face.

"And why not fight a woman, if you would insult her, Boston Purdy?"

"You know darned well, Keno Kate, that I'd be strung up in less than a minute if I hurtled you, while these galoots would split their throats howlin' with delight if you turned up my toes to their daisies."

"Right you be, pard," cried a voice, and a yell of laughter followed the remark.

"You refuse to fight me, then, Boston Purdy?"

"Of course I does."

"I hain't no born fool."

"Will you fight one, then, whom I will name as my proxy?"

"Yer what?"

"As my defender."

"I'll do it darned sudden."

The woman glanced over the crowd amid a deathlike silence, as though to select one to fight her battle for her.

Not a man moved, and many an eye dared not meet hers.

All knew Boston Purdy.

He was a man of desperate nature, of iron nerve, and had a record most unsavory.

A number of good men had fallen by his hand, and he was known as one whose aim never failed, whose muscles of steel never quivered.

To face him would be like signing one's death-warrant, for all in that large crowd, except very few.

At last the eyes of the woman turned upon Lord Lonsfield and rested there.

There was a wicked, revengeful expression about the handsome mouth as she looked at him and said, in her low, sweet tones once more:

"I ask Lonsfield, a gentleman of title and an officer of the English Army to resent the insult to me, an American woman, if he dare do so."

There was a taunt in her words which a far less brave man than was Lord Lonsfield would have at once responded to by meeting in her defense the desperado.

As every eye turned upon him they saw that he did not flinch, and his voice was unmoved by excitement as he replied:

"Thus appealed to, madam, I accept the gauntlet thrown down and will meet your insulter."

A perfect yell of admiration broke forth at this, but was quickly hushed by Surgeon Powell's ringing voice, crying:

"And I object!"

"I say no, Keno Kate."

"The English gentleman has accepted, Surgeon Powell," and again came that wicked look about the woman's mouth.

"I care not; I say no, and you wish no trouble

with me, Keno Kate," was the determined response of Frank Powell.

"And I say no, for this gentleman is Colonel Loyal's guest, and was not brought here to fight a cut-throat," and Lieutenant Onderdonk stepped to the side of the surgeon.

"And I say no!"

The words rung out sternly, and came from the lips of Buffalo Bill.

Keno Kate bit her lips nervously, and glanced over her shoulder.

Emerald Ed was there and stepped forward.

"That man is my game, gentlemen."

"Are you ready, Boston Purdy?"

Though taken by surprise, the desperado drew his revolver quickly, there was no chance to interfere, a cry of alarm went up, men scattered right and left, and two revolvers cracked together.

Both bullets found a target.

Emerald Ed killed his man, while Boston Purdy's shot a cowboy in the background, missing the one he aimed at by a hair's breadth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FAIR FRAUD.

IN the confusion that followed the quickly-ended duel between Emerald Ed and Boston Purdy, Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill led their guests hastily from the gambling saloon, along with Lieutenant Onderdonk.

They walked rapidly until they reached the quarters of the Englishmen, where they all went in for a few minutes' talk.

"Late hours are hardly conducive to a steady nerve for to-morrow's shooting," said Lieutenant Onderdonk, and Lord Lonsfield made reply:

"Nor such scenes as we went through to-night to men whose nerves are not steady; but I would not have missed the visit to Devil's Acre for a fortune."

"But now to your going to Overland Station to-morrow, Mr. Cody, to see the man who was trainmaster for Granger Goldhurst—"

"Yes, sir, I start as soon as the shooting is over, and will camp some ten miles from the fort on my way."

"If I can get him to return here with me, that you and Sir John may have a talk with him, I will, but if not I shall cross-question him like a Philadelphia lawyer to get all the facts I can from him."

"Then that is understood, and please command me for all expenses, payments necessary and all that, for there is a fund for that purpose, you know."

"I will call on you, sir, for all actual expenses," was the response of the scout, which went to convince both Lord Lonsfield and Sir John that the scout did not intend to accept pay for his own work.

"Now, Surgeon Powell, tell me, please, for I ask from curiosity, what is to be done about the death of that desperado to-night?"

"No more than to bury him, my lord, and the boys will have a big time at the funeral, and perhaps kill another man or two."

"Then you look upon it as a case of good riddance?"

"Certainly, for the man has been a terror in his way, and a generally disturbing quantity in this community."

"He had no right to kiss Keno Kate, and he should have accepted the punishment Buffalo Bill here gave him, and let it drop."

"But he angered the woman by his words, and that worked up to the climax, which ended in his death."

"You think the woman was sincere in her desire to fight a duel with him?"

"Oh, yes, for she would face a buzz saw, and more, she would have killed him, dead shot though he was, for she is quicker than unchained lightning."

"And the man Emerald Ed, is quick, and a dead shot, too?"

"He is, indeed, and he was right to take the matter into his own hands, for it saved trouble."

"But now we must break up and seek our cots, for we do not wish to ruin the target to-morrow."

With a glass all round the party separated for the night, and the two Englishmen were left to talk over alone their experiences of the past few hours.

With smoking-caps, jackets, and slippers on, they lighted their pipes, and having a glass of brandy and soda at their elbows, they discussed as was their wont the free-hearted, brave and hospitable people their lot had been cast among.

In their summing up of the case the Americans by no means suffered at their hands, and they came to the conclusion that wild life on the border was an evil that had to be handled without gloves, and the army officers knew just how to manage it, without being too iron-handed in their treatment, and which would cause half a dozen innocent people to suffer for one who was guilty.

At last they retired to rest, and when called the next morning they found that they had slept until ten o'clock.

"We had an eight-hour sleep after all, John, so should be steady in nerve," said Lord Lons-

field, stepping to the door that connected their respective sleeping rooms.

"Yes, and I have had the nightmare, for that Boston Purdy was chasing me around half the night," answered Sir John.

"And I remember now that Keno Kate was in my dreams half the night."

"By the way, that reminds me to ask you what was the matter with you and the fair fairy of the faro bank last night?"

"Did you notice anything?"

"I did."

"You lost five hundred dollars, I believe?"

"Yes, just that sum; but the entertainment was cheap at that price."

"Well, here is your money."

"What money, Lucien?"

"Your losses."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I watched the fair Keno Kate like a hawk, and you know that I am an expert at cards."

"Yes, and burdened with luck too."

"I was surprised to see you lose last night."

"I caught the trick of Kate of Keno name and fame."

"The trick?"

"Yes, she had a double dealers' box and allowed us to win to catch us for big money in the end."

"I merely showed her that I saw her cheating, that I knew her to be a fair fraud, and asked her to give me the exact change for a thousand dollar note."

"She did so?"

"Yes, the change and the losses."

"That was why she selected me for the honor of avenging her."

"She wanted Mr. Boston Purdy to shoot you."

"Just that and nothing more; but come, let us have a brandy and soda, then breakfast, for to-day we must make or save our name as shots."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SHOOTING-MATCH.

THE day of the shooting-match dawned bright and beautiful.

There were prizes of intrinsic value to be shot for, as well as for the honor of winning them, and the lists were open to all competitors among the officers of the garrison or guests.

There were prizes for non-commissioned officers, and also for the soldiers, and the crack shots had all entered, so that the day would be an exciting one.

Not only had the two Englishmen entered to shoot for the Officers' Prizes, but they had put up six purses of gold, three containing one hundred dollars, and three fifty dollars, first and second prizes for non-commissioned officers, the privates and the scouts.

This handsome offering at once won favor with all, adding to the popularity of the two Englishmen, who were already prime favorites in the garrison.

After the noonday meal all began to assemble on the field where the trial of skill was to take place, and it seemed as though the whole garrison and settlements had turned out for the occasion.

The affair of the night before, at Devil's Acre, had become noised around, and by noon it was known to every one in the garrison that Lord Lonsfield had been selected by Keno Kate to avenge the insult offered her, that Buffalo Bill had hurled the desperado half across the saloon, and Emerald Ed had killed Boston Purdy in a duel.

About the affair, however, the officers were as silent as clams, and Lord Lonsfield and Sir John looked as though they had retired with the chickens the night before, for they were as fresh as morning-glories.

Many of the ladies at the fort had hoped that the occasion would bring out Emerald Ed and the fair Faro Fairy, that they might have a look at them.

But nowhere were those two to be seen among the crowd.

Captain Taylor was master of ceremonies, and read out the lists of prizes for the various contestants, and he paid a handsome compliment to Lord Lonsfield and Sir John for the generous purses offered by them.

At this Lord Lonsfield stepped forward, and placing something in the hands of Captain Taylor, said a few words to him in a low tone.

The captain turned to Colonel Loyal, and he joined in the conference, when Captain Taylor continued:

"I desire to state that Lord Lonsfield has just placed in my hands, for himself and Sir John Reeder, a purse containing five hundred dollars in gold, and with the permission of Colonel Loyal, the one making the best shots, drawing all averages, with rifle, revolver, and revolver-firing when mounted, whether it be a private soldier, non-commissioned officer, scout or commissioned officer, will win this very handsome prize, which will be known as the British Hussars' Purse."

"If won by a commissioned officer the money is to go toward the purchase of a suitable badge of that value, blending the English and Amer-

ican flags, and the names of the Hussars and the Regiment the winner belongs to."

"The same holds good if won by a lady shot, of whom there are a number on this list."

"If won by a scout, non-commissioned officer or private, it is his privilege to say whether it shall be a badge, or the purse of gold."

"Three cheers for our colonel's English guests!" cried a stentorian voiced sergeant in the crowd, and they were given with a will, and three times three and a "tiger."

The two Englishmen stepped upon the platform and saluted with their swords, for they had determined to shoot in their uniforms for the honor of Old England.

Then Captain Taylor had the names on the list for the private's prize, and the men stepped to the front and shot with precision and rapidity.

"Private Charles Lewis, of B Troop, Fifth Cavalry, leads in revolver-shooting, winning the Private's Prize, and the purse offered by the colonel's guests."

"His average is ninety out of a hundred," called out the captain, and the soldiers cheered wildly, for ninety was very hard to beat for the Hussars' Prize.

The non-commissioned officers shot next, and the captain read out:

"Ordnance Sergeant Samuel Spriggs Carroll of Fifth Cavalry wins the prize for non-commissioned officers, and the purse offered by the colonel's guests, for his average in the three styles of shooting is just ninety."

A cheer broke from the sergeants and corporals at this, for they at least tied their adversary among the privates.

Next the scouts came up at call, led by Buffalo Bill, who, as chief was to shoot with the officers.

They were a splendid looking body of men, and went at their work in fine style.

There were some twenty of them, and as all the scouts considered themselves the "best shots," all shot for the prize.

A cheer went up as Captain Taylor called out:

"The best average for all-round shooting is ninety, and Texas Jack wins the Scouts' Prize, and the First Prize Purse offered by Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder."

The soldiers, non-commissioned officers and scouts were a tie, in the average, and Don Eduardo Vincente at once put up a handsome purse for the three winners to shoot off the tie.

It was done, and Texas Jack won with an average of ninety-three, causing the scouts to go wild with delight.

The second prizes of a fifty dollar purse were then given to the next best men in the shooting, and Captain Taylor called the competitors for the Officers' Prize, after which the one holding the highest average of all who competed would be given the British Hussars' Prize of the purse, or a badge, as the case might be, according to the winner.

All was at once suppressed excitement in the crowd, for it was known that there were crack shots among those who were to face the target now.

CHAPTER XXX.

DEAD SHOTS.

WHEN Captain Taylor called out the list of contestants for the Officers' Prizes, all listened in breathless silence.

Of course those who had just shot were deeply interested to know whether the record of Texas Jack's shots would be broken.

The scouts hoped that it would not, unless by Buffalo Bill, while the soldiers knew that if not, Texas Jack would get the British Hussars' Purse.

The list of names began with Major Sidway, who was a fine shot, and then ran on down a score of names, ending those of rank with Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk.

Next came the names of those appointed "honorary members" for the shooting-match, and Captain Taylor ran down the list as follows:

"Colonel Lord Lucien Lonsfield, of the British Hussars."

"Don Eduardo Vincente, of Mexico."

"Miss Irene Barrington, Sponsor for the Nineteenth Infantry."

"Miss Caro Sidway, Sponsor for Battery A, Flying Artillery."

"Miss Madge Burton, Daughter of the Fifth Cavalry."

"Miss Bessie Bond, of Ranch Isle."

Then followed half a dozen names of young married ladies and maidens unknown to the reader, and of no interest to my romance, after which Captain Taylor ended with:

"And last on the list, but whom I believe you will find by no means the least, come two gentlemen who added their names at the end, not expecting to be present at the match."

"I refer to Doctor Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout, and to William F. Cody, Chief of Scouts and better known as Buffalo Bill."

A wild cheer greeted these two names, and then the shooting was begun, the rifles being first brought out.

The tally was kept and called out, and resulted in the two Englishmen, Don Eduardo,

Surgeon Powell, Lieutenant Onderdonk, Buffalo Bill, and three ladies being a tie.

"This trio of fair dead-shots were Mustang Madge, Caro Sidway and Bessie Bond."

In shooting off the ties the two English officers, Surgeon Powell, Buffalo Bill and Mustang Madge made a tie again, and a third trial resulted in Mustang Madge winning, with a portion of space only between her shots and the others.

In the revolver-shooting from a draw and emptying six shots at ten paces, the two Englishmen and the others dropped far behind the leaders, who were Surgeon Powell, Don Eduardo, Buffalo Bill, Bessie Bond and Mustang Madge.

Shooting off the tie, Buffalo Bill and Mustang Madge again tied, and a third trial left Buffalo Bill the winner.

Then came the shooting from horseback, dashing by at full speed and emptying a pair of revolvers right and left at six different targets on each side, the size of a man.

Bessie Bond and Madge were the only ladies to enter this trial of skill, though all of the officers did so as well as the two Englishmen.

The first run all round left all out excepting Madge, Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, who were a tie.

In the second run Buffalo Bill and Madge were a tie and Surgeon Powell won.

There was loud cheering now, and all waited breathlessly after the excitement subsided for averages.

After a while came the announcement from Captain Taylor:

"Mustang Madge the Daughter of the Fifth wins the prize for rifle-shooting, Surgeon Powell for mounted revolver shooting and Buffalo Bill for draw and fire revolver-shooting."

"The averages of the three named is ninety-nine, and they, therefore, are a tie."

"To beat ninety-nine the winner must center the bull's-eye, in each of the three styles of shooting."

"Prepare for the contest!"

Madge at once stepped to position, raised her rifle, and fired.

"A dead center bull's-eye!" called out the marker, and a wild yell rung out from the crowd.

Buffalo Bill followed with marvelous quickness and then came the cry:

"Dead center bull's-eye!"

Amid the cheering Surgeon Powell stepped to the mark, threw his rifle to his shoulder, and pulled trigger.

"Dead center bull's-eye!" called out the marker, and the cheering was deafening.

Then came the "Draw revolver and fire," and Madge put all of six shots in the bull's-eye, but did not center one.

Surgeon Powell followed with six in dead center.

Then came Buffalo Bill with five dead-center shots and one a fraction off.

Leaping into her saddle Madge went on her run, firing right and left at the targets, a revolver in either hand.

Any one of her twelve shots would have "killed her man," but Surgeon Powell put his six in the space of six inches square.

Buffalo Bill shot by like a rocket, for that was his favorite way of fighting, and most dangerous, and every shot was placed within a circle three inches in diameter.

Then the average was made and Captain Taylor answered:

"Buffalo Bill wins the purse of the British Hussars!"

"Have a badge made, please, Captain Taylor, with the money, as a souvenir of Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder's visit to the Wild West," modestly said Buffalo Bill, and his words were greeted with the wildest enthusiasm, the ladies cheering and waving their handkerchiefs.

The prizes were then distributed at the colonel's request by Lord Lonsfield, and in delivering the one to Madge he said:

"You asked no favor, Miss Madge, and were shown none."

"You won squarely on your merits, and a dead shot yourself, it took the best shot on the frontier to beat you, and he did it by a margin so small that it was just a miss, that was all."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AFTER THE SHOOT.

IT was the triumph of Madge Burton's life, to hold her own as she had through such a splendidly contested shooting-match, and against the "giants" of the border.

There was an unwritten law, yet a binding one that no favor should be shown by any one who entered the lists, and the ladies knew that politeness on the part of their rival adversaries would not allow them to win.

There were officers, too, who, no matter how high their appreciation of the fair sex, did not intend to have it said, if they could help it, that they had been worsted in a match by the ladies.

They were particularly anxious to beat Mustang Madge, and she had been just as desirous of getting the best of them.

She had shot at private matches, on the prairie.

and once on the parade ground, against competitors who had been compelled to acknowledge her prowess; but this time it was with rifle and revolver, mounted and afoot, and she had to face Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, the two shots most famed upon the border.

And she had very nearly been the victor, surprising every one by her nerve and deadly aim, and no one more than the two Englishmen.

Upon every side she was congratulated, while the Fifth Cavalry were wild over her success.

After offering his congratulations to Madge and receiving hers in return, Buffalo Bill made his way to his quarters, accompanied by Surgeon Powell.

His horse was ready for him, his haversack filled with provisions, his ammunition belt full, and all prepared for his ride to Overland Station to see the man whom he knew as Boss Bill.

"Well, Bill, I suppose you will be back within four or five days, if you have no trouble in finding your man?" said Surgeon Powell.

"Yes, Doc, I hope to, and I am anxious to get all the information I can for those English officers, for I never saw two men I liked better upon short acquaintance."

"Nor I, for they are thorough gentlemen, fearless and true as steel to friend or foe."

"Why there is no back down in either of them, and what is more they appreciate us out here and put on no nonsense."

"I like them, Bill, immensely and hope to help them out in their mission."

"As I do; but it seems Lord Lonsfield caught the Faro Fairy cheating last night?"

"He did indeed, and backed her down, for he made her hand over their losses in the coolest manner possible, and never told on her either, except to let me know it, and he said he would not make it known."

"He has sharper eyes than any of us, for I never suspected her of being such a fraud."

"Nor I; but did you see how quickly she grew revengeful and wanted Boston Purdy to kill him?"

"Oh yes, I saw it, and he would have fought Purdy without doubt, had we let him."

"Yes indeed he is not a man to back down; but what do you think of the Daughter of the Fifth's shooting?"

"She's a little wonder, a phenomenal shot, with a nerve any man might be proud of."

"She is indeed."

Then followed some conversation on other topics, and mounting his horse Buffalo Bill bade his comrades good-by, for they were pards as intimate as brothers, and rode away on his lonely trail to Overland Station.

The Surgeon Scout attended dinner that night at Colonel Loyal's, where he had been invited with the two Englishmen and a number of others.

Of course the main topic of conversation was of the shooting match, and it was seen that the ladies were very proud of the victory won by Madge.

Bessie Bond had mounted her horse and ridden home, immediately after the match, and there were several who said that she had a really hateful expression marring her beautiful face, as though she was angry at her failure to get a prize, and envious of the triumph of Mustang Madge.

"The belle of the border really seemed out of sorts to-day for some reason, I thought," said a young officer to Lord Lonsfield.

"She did not appear as bright as usual, I also thought," was the answer.

"And it looked to me as though she was a trifle nervous," said Lieutenant Onderdonk.

"So it seemed to me," said Captain Taylor, and he continued:

"She has been called by many the rival of Our Daughter of the Fifth, but she certainly is not, though she is a very nervy woman, a superb rider, and a dead shot, I may say."

"I have been glad to see her becoming more sociable, and I sincerely hope she is not miffed, and will not exile herself again to her home."

"By the way, Lord Lonsfield, you and Sir John have been most highly honored in being invited to Isle Ranch."

"So we have understood, Captain Taylor; but we certainly appreciate the honor."

"And what of her at home?"

"A refined, lovely woman, a perfect hostess, with every surrounding of civilization, music, art and a library, to make her contented, yet withal a perfect mystery to me, as she is also to Sir John."

"That is just what she is to all of us, though somehow I feel that there is one exception."

"And who is he?" asked several voices at once.

But Captain Taylor replied:

"I cannot say, for I may be wrong, though I think there is one at the post who knows more of her than the rest of us do."

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANANIAS AND SAPHIRA.

BUFFALO BILL rode away from the fort as quickly as possible.

He did not care to attract any attention to his going, and simply said to the officer of the day,

as he passed out of the stockade gate, and who asked him which way he was going:

"Off on a short scout, sir."

His trail was one that led him down the river, and which would carry him by the Ranch Isle, or within sight of it.

He had gone several miles when he came upon a trail that had a very fresh look to it.

"It leads from the fort, yet not the way I have come."

"Here is Miss Bessie's trail, but she has come as I have."

"Who can it be, and I wonder if any harm is intended the Border Belle?"

"There was a rough crowd at the post to see the shooting match, and some one of them may have seen the girl ride off alone, or known that she was in the habit of it, and so followed her, or ridden on ahead to ambush her."

"I will push on, for I may be of service, and I will camp before many miles for a rest."

So saying he urged his horse into a sweeping gallop.

This pace he held for a couple of miles, and coming to a ridge drew rein.

He dismounted and walked up the hill.

Beyond was the valley with the river winding from it, and about three miles distant was Ranch Isle.

He knew that he could catch glimpses of the trail nearly to the ranch and see any one going along it.

Over the ridge was some timber, and then the valley was open, only dotted here and there with mottes.

The scout halted his horse and peered cautiously over the ridge at a point where there were some bushes.

The trail left by the horse of Bessie Bond, and that of the horse of some unknown rider, led over the ridge.

Cautiously the scout peered through the bushes, and there a mile away in the edge of a clump of timber he beheld two persons.

They were seated upon a fallen tree, as his field-glass plainly revealed, and their horses were feeding near.

The scout gave a low whistle.

It was a whistle that meant as much as words that he had made a discovery.

One was Bessie Bond, and the other was Don Eduardo Vincente.

"They do not care to be seen, that is certain, and I do not wish them to know that I have seen them, so I will get back on the trail until the meeting is at an end, for to flank them would take me miles out of my way to the upper ford."

"Ah! they rise, and he has led her horse up for her to mount."

"She has gone on homeward, and he is coming this way."

Quickly the scout returned to his horse, mounted and rode rapidly back upon the trail for half a mile.

Then he turned and came slowly along toward the ridge again.

He had not ridden far before he saw Don Eduardo Vincente ride over the ridge.

He came straight on, caught sight of Buffalo Bill, halted and then rode on again.

As they drew near Buffalo Bill called out:

"Ho, Don Eduardo, I thought I left you at the fort?"

"No, I rode off for a rapid gallop for exercise, for I have not been feeling just right of late."

"You shot pretty well for a sick man."

"Not up to my average, not near so well as you, Powell or that wonderful girl, Senorita Madge."

"Well, I am off on a trail for a few days?"

"Which way do you go, Senor Buffalo Bill?"

"Down the river, and on a circuit."

"Any Indian news?"

"None; but have you seen any one from the fort since you came out?"

"No one."

"Well, I must be off, so good-evening, Don."

"Good-day, Senor Buffalo Bill."

"I hope you will return soon and in safety."

"Thank you, sir."

And as Buffalo Bill rode on he muttered to himself:

"That man told me a deliberate story."

"He has some reason for not wishing to have me know he met Bessie Bond."

"I wonder if she would say as much as he."

"By Jove! I will try her."

He rode rapidly on now, watching the trails as before.

At last he came to the spot where he had seen the two, and he closely searched the surroundings.

"She waited for him to come here, for here are the tracks of her horse."

"When he came they dismounted, and he led the horses yonder to feed."

"She left the fort before I did, and he departed by the north gate, I'll wager high, and made a flank movement."

"Well, they were talking here for over an hour, that is certain."

"Now to see what she says."

He rode rapidly on now, and arriving at the gate of Ranch Isle asked the cowboy who confronted him if he could see Miss Bessie Bond for a moment.

The cowboy called to another, who mounted his horse and rode away toward the house, but soon returned accompanied by Bessie Bond.

In vain had Buffalo Bill tried to draw the cowboy into conversation, for he could get nothing out of him.

"Ah, Mr. Cody, it is you?"

"Yes, Miss Bessie, and I sent for you to know if you got safely home, for I am off on a trail, and I noticed a track following yours, coming in beyond the ridge, and knowing what a crowd there was at the fort, I was anxious about you."

"You are very kind, but no one troubled me."

"You saw no one there?"

"Not any one, Buffalo Bill, but I thank you."

"I am glad you got home in safety," and raising his sombrero, Buffalo Bill rode on his way, without once being asked to enter that *terra incognita* to so many who longed to see within the walls of Ranch Isle.

"Both of them lied to me," muttered the scout as he rode on his way.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON THE WAY.

BUFFALO BILL had food for thought as he rode along on his lonely trail.

Could it be that the beautiful Bessie, with a chance to wed some handsome, dashing young officer of the army, was going to make a match with the Mexican, a man whom Buffalo Bill had never really liked?

It would seem so, from what he had seen.

It certainly looked like a love affair.

They had met far from the fort, and had not gone together.

Had Don Eduardo escorted her home then, nothing might have been thought of it.

But their meeting had been planned in secret, and they had met far from the fort.

This looked like a secret love affair, which either the man or the girl did not care to have known.

That they were sincere in this desire was proven by the fact that both had told the scout a deliberate falsehood.

So Buffalo Bill rode on until the shadows fell, and then went into a camp off the trail, which he knew well, having often in scouting passed a night there before.

He was tired from his late loss of sleep, and knew that he had a good sentinel in his faithful horse, one that would arouse him at any approach of danger.

The camp was in a nook among the rocks, and there was wood, water and grass there in abundance.

He awoke at dawn, greatly refreshed, cooked his breakfast and was in the saddle by sunrise.

As he turned into the trail he saw the tracks of three horses.

"Ah! some one went along last night after I did."

"Were they after me, I wonder?"

"Maybe so, and unable to see the trail were searching for my camp-fire."

"We fooled them, though, did we not, pard?"

He rode on more rapidly now, for he had decided to find out who the men were.

He kept his eyes well ahead, not to ride into any ambush, made a circuit of every rock and thicket close to the trail, and had gone some ten miles when he suddenly rode over a ridge, just off the tracks and out of range, to see three horsemen coming toward him.

They were cowboys, from their appearance, and were evidently searching the trail as they came.

Had they gotten first to the ridge they would have seen him coming; but as it was they were first discovered.

"Cowboys, and from Ranch Isle."

"The same three who went along this trail last night."

"I don't like one of those Ranch Isle men, for they are so morose and unsociable."

"No one knows them at the fort, either, and they look like a hard lot, though I have never heard of their being caught in any rascality."

"Maybe they have orders from that strange young rancher Miss Bessie, to have nothing to say to any one."

Just then the three men caught sight of him and halted suddenly.

For a moment there seemed to be some cause of excitement among them, when once more they rode on their way.

"Ho, pards, lost any cattle?" called out the scout, still keeping on his way.

"No," was the abrupt answer.

"Thought you had, for you passed my camp last night coming this way."

The men were silent an instant and then one said:

"One of our pards got away with some of our dust, and we were on the hunt for him."

"Have you seen any man on a bay horse?"

"No, nor any trail but yours."

"Good-morning," and Buffalo Bill rode on once more, as did the cowboys.

But the man who had before spoken turned and called out:

"If you see him and get our dust we'll go you halves."

"His name is Half-Breed Harry, and he's part Injun and Mexican."

"If I see him I'll get your money and give it to you, for I don't go halve for doing work the Government pays me for," and Buffalo Bill again continued on his way, muttering to himself:

"Half-Breed Harry, eh?"

"Well, there is a man of that name and description at the Ranch Isle, and a villainous looking fellow he is too."

"I'll watch out for him now, and when I return too, for maybe they have lied to me, also."

Some miles further on he came to where the cowboys had halted to camp for the night.

From there, with no tracks to show a search, they had turned back.

"It looks as though they were afraid of Half-Breed Harry, and only wished to make a show of catching him."

"It seems to me if I was a coward I would not wish to live."

"To be afraid of a man, of doing one's duty, of dying must be an awful life to live."

"Why, if I was afraid of one thing I would be of another, and existence would be unbearable."

"I would be afraid of accidents, afraid my horse would fall, my revolver would go off, of everybody and everything."

"It must be terrible to be a coward," and thus philosophizing, the scout, who had never known fear, rode on to his noonday camp, from there to his night camp, and the following day struck the stage trail and rode into the frontier settlement known as Overland City.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A ROAD-AGENT.

OVERLAND CITY was high-sounding in name, and down in the depths in its reality.

It was a place on the Overland stage trail where the trails crossed, and the "city" consisted of a few dozen shanties scattered around a large structure known as the Overland Inn.

From the trail coming over the mountains where he got a view of the place, Buffalo Bill likened it to a hen and chickens.

There were mines not far away, a few settlers scattered about the valley, and it was an important point from a stage point of view, and one which passengers never forgot during a lifetime.

The tavern was a board and log structure, with a very large bar-room, small bedrooms, and no comfort anywhere, while the meals obtained at the Overland Inn were something to remember.

Perhaps five hundred souls dwelt in Overland City, and the main business of the place was staging.

There were sheds for the stage horses, and others for the stages, while here and there gathered scores of men and youths connected with the Overland Line.

Those important personages, the stage-drivers, had their homes here, and then there were wagons and teams to transfer settlers from Overland City to any point off the line where they wished to go.

The Pony Express also had Overland City for its station, and a dozen of the small, sinewy, fearless riders could be seen there at a time.

A number of saloons and gambling-houses could be seen, with an invalid-looking church and a school-house combined.

Then there were three stores, a wagon and blacksmith shop, and half a dozen gambling dens.

The rest of the "city" was made up of boarding-houses, such as they were, for there was not a private dwelling in the place, for all took boarders.

It was nearing noon when Buffalo Bill came in sight of Overland City, and at a point on the mountain twelve miles away.

He had turned into the stage trail a mile back, and saw the tracks of a coach which had just gone by toward the station.

In fact as he drew rein he could hear the distant rumbling of the coach ahead.

Deciding not to halt for dinner, but to go on to Overland City, as he rode into full view of it far down in the valley, he stopped for a few minutes to enjoy the grand view spread out before him, and likened the station with its big tavern and sheds, and smaller houses scattered about, to a hen and her chickens.

He was about to continue on his way again when he heard a loud command ring up from the valley, the rumbling of wheels ceased and all was silence.

The scout knew but too well that terrifying command:

"Halt and hands up!"

The coach had been halted by road-agents.

How many Buffalo Bill did not stop to ask, or consider.

He was not a man to count odds.

Upon the border his duty was to protect those

who needed his aid, uphold the weak against the strong, to support the law against the lawless.

With a word to his horse he was off down the winding stage trail toward the scene, and suddenly turning a bend dashed upon the coach and those who had halted it.

There were two of them, one standing in front of the horses, his rifle leveled at the driver's head, the other by the side of the coach, revolver in hand, demanding the gold and jewels of what passengers there were.

The ground was soft on the trail and the coming of Buffalo Bill's horse had not been heard by the road-agents, though the keen ears of the driver had detected it.

The moment he came upon the scene Buffalo Bill saw that but one man stood in the way of the forward movement of the coach, and as quick as a flash he leveled his revolver.

It was one of those running shots mounted which he had won his prize on in the shooting-match, and of which he was master.

His nerve and aim did not fail him now, when he was firing at a human being any more than when he aimed at a target, for his bullet sunk into the outlaw's head.

The moment the man fell the driver gained his nerve and his whip fell upon the backs of his horses and away dashed the coach, trampling and crunching over the body of the road-agent.

The man at the coach door was taken completely by surprise, for he was about to secure a very rich booty from an army paymaster who was the only passenger.

But the open door, as the coach suddenly dashed on, knocked the outlaw down, and his revolver fell from his hand.

Around the bend swept the coach, the driver only anxious to take care of himself and his passenger, and leaving his daring rescuer to his fate, if he could not fight his way out.

But still the road-agent had not seen from whence came the shot, and half-stunned by the door striking him, and his fall, he was incapable almost of resistance, when the scout drew rein over him, sprung from his horse and revolver in hand tore his mask from his face, while he cried:

"Hands up pard, or die!"

But with the words the mask had been torn off and then came from the lips of the scout in amazement:

"Boss Bill the trainmaster!"

"You a road-agent?"

"The very man I came to find."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TRAINMASTER.

"BUFFALO BILL!" gasped the trainmaster.

"Yes."

"Then I am a dead man."

"Your comrade is there."

"Yes, you killed him?"

"I did, and you deserve the same fate."

"I know it, and I suppose I will hang."

"Are there any more of you?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Only we two."

"Who is he?"

"One of my men at the station."

"You are still wagon trainmaster at Overland City?"

"I was up to date, but it's over now."

"Who was the driver of the coach?"

"Cal Kirby."

"I do not know him."

"No, a new hand from eastward, or he'd not have run off and left you."

"Why did you put your neck in the noose by such an act, Boss Bill?"

"Oh Lord, Buffalo Bill, it's a sad story."

"I had laid up a snug pile, and I got to gambling and it all went, my home, horses and all, and I was to be sold out in the town where I lived, and where my old mother has the home, for she is old and feeble."

"I was desperate, Buffalo Bill, and I knew from papers I got that a paymaster was coming through on Kirby's coach to-day with a large sum of money, and so I was tempted to get it."

"I would not have robbed a man or woman for anything; but the Government would not miss it, and out of all the stock I had saved for the soldiers, and all I had done, I had never been even thanked."

"So I just told the man lying there to help me, and we would play road-agent, and get the paymaster's money."

"He left Overland City yesterday, and I came out this morning, and we met here, put on these clothes and masks, and—well, you know the rest, and, Buffalo Bill, you will hang me, I know."

Buffalo Bill was silent for a minute and lost in thought.

At last he said:

"Who is that dead man?"

"One of the black sheep of the Overland lay-out, Buffalo Bill."

"He has no kin in Overland City?"

"None in all the world, Buffalo Bill, that I have ever heard of."

"Good! now, can I trust you, Boss Bill?"

"Yes, indeed, for I'm as penitent now as a whipped cur."

"You are sure you were not recognized by Kirby?"

"Sure; he would never know me in this rig and the mask there."

"And the paymaster?"

"I don't know him."

"What excuse can you offer for being away from Overland City?"

"I don't know."

"Have you a horse?"

"I came on foot."

"And your pard?"

"His horse is in the thicket yonder."

"Leave him there, and now tell me one thing."

"Yes, Bill."

"Is there not a near cut on foot to Overland City you can take?"

"Yes, it is half the difference of the stage trail."

"Well, Boss Bill, I will tell you that I came here to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes; you were wagon-master years ago for a settler by the name of Granger Goldhurst?"

"Yes, yes, twelve years ago."

"I remember now."

"He and his whole people were afterward massacred by the Sioux."

"Well, that is the man I came to see you about, and I just have this to say to you."

"Yes."

"I believe your story about this intended robbery, and that you are repentant now."

"Lord knows I am."

"If I could undo my act I would be a happy man."

"Well, I am going to trust you for there is a chance for you to reform your life, and I'll help you."

"Oh, pard!"

"As no one knows that you are the robber, I will go on to Overland City, carrying that dead man."

"I'll report that his comrade got away, which will be the truth."

"You strike out on foot for Overland City, make good time, and see me there to-night."

"Then we will talk over the Goldhurst matter, and there may be some money in it for you."

"I'll do just as you tell me, Buffalo Bill."

"If you do not, if you do not meet me in Overland City to-night, then I will tell that you were the other road-agent, and I'll hunt you down as sure as my name is William Cody, mark my words."

"I won't fail you, Buffalo Bill."

"I will be there."

"As your comrade was killed, as you did not get the money, and I believe it is your first offense, I will keep your secret, and see what I can do for you."

"Now be off, and lose no time in getting to Overland City."

"I will get the horse and come on with the body."

"God bless you, Buffalo Bill; but I'll talk to you another time."

"Now I am too scared to stop longer, since you say I can go."

"Yes, go, and remember to meet me in Overland City to-night."

"I'll be there, never fear," and wringing the scout's hand the wagon-master, with an awed glance at his dead comrade, bounded away down the trail to go on foot to Overland City.

In the thicket indicated, Buffalo Bill found the dead man's horse, and strapping the body to the saddle he mounted his own horse and rode down the stage trail toward the station which he knew would be in a furor of excitement at the report of the holding up of the stage, as soon as Cal Kirby got in to tell his story.

At one place in the trail he saw far ahead, and his field-glass, which he never went without, showed the coach thundering along in the valley, half a dozen miles ahead.

"That fellow Cal Kirby is scared half out of his wits, and will kill his team at the rate he is going."

"I suppose I'll have a hundred men coming out to kill or capture the road-agents."

"Well, I believe poor Boss Bill was in earnest in what he said about its being his first sin of the kind."

"The temptation was too much for him, and it was lucky his pard handed in his chips, for if he had not been killed, then I would have had to tell on him, too."

"I ought to do so now, I suppose; but then I must find out all that Boss Bill knows about the Goldhurst affair, and I guess that he will profit by the fright and lesson he has had and not go wrong any more."

"At least I hope so, and if he does, why I can find him."

"My! but how that wild driver goes."

"He'll resign from the trail after this, I am sure," and with a laugh at the man's fright, Buffalo Bill coolly went on, leading the horse with his dead master tied to his saddle by the stake-rope.

When he arrived within half a mile of Overland City he saw half a hundred mounted men coming toward him at a gallop, and all armed to the teeth.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FLUNG IN HIS TEETH.

THE driver of the coach that had been held up, was a new hand.

Or rather, though a splendid driver, his run had been further East where such a thing as a road-agent was unknown.

He had been several trips on the run out of Overland City, and had gone through in safety and on time.

But then no one looked for a stage to be held up within twenty miles of Overland City, and it was said that the road-agents had all left the neighborhood.

When, then, Calvin Kirby beheld a man step out of a thicket with a rifle leveled at him, and take stand in front of his leaders, and another appear with a revolver, while he uttered the ominous words:

"Halt! and hands up!" Cal Kirby was not the man to disobey the command.

He halted with dispatch, dropped his reins upon his knees, and held up his hands with an alacrity, which was indicative of long and frequent practice.

There was in the coach he knew a paymaster of the United States Army.

He had been told that the paymaster carried considerable money, and was directed to put him through in safety.

But with trembling limbs he sat upon his box, his hands elevated and wondering if he was to be allowed to go on with his life.

Then came the fall of hoofs, and the scout dashed into sight.

A shot dropped the man before his leaders, and Cal Kirby sent his team ahead with a rush.

It was lucky for the paymaster that he was a splendid driver, or he would have dashed the stage to destruction.

But he kept his flying horses in the trail, his foot upon the brake, and went on in the same mad rush.

It was down-hill and that caused the horses to fairly fly.

The munching of bones as the wheels passed over the dead road-agent yet echoed in his ears, and his heart was in a tremor of fear and horror.

The valley was reached, yet still he pushed his team to a run.

Had the rescuer been killed, and would not the outlaws pursue?

How many more outlaws were there than he had seen?

Such thoughts filled his brain as he urged along, and not until the first cabins in Overland City were close at hand did he draw rein.

A few moments after, with his horses reeking with foam, and panting like hounds after a long run, the coach drew rein before the door of the Overland Inn.

Several times had the paymaster called to the driver to slacken up and see if the road-agents were following.

Then he asked him to halt and turn back, and see what had become of their brave rescuer.

But Cal Kirby would neither halt or slacken rein.

It was Cal Kirby he wished to save from the road-agents, and only when safe in the tavern would he feel that his life was spared.

When he blew his horn, to announce his coming, it had a wild, weird, startled sound that brought the people out quickly to welcome the incoming coach.

Then they stood before the Overland Inn, a hundred or more, and a glance was sufficient to show them that something had happened on the trail.

Once he put his foot on the brakes and came to a halt, Cal Kirby felt his importance.

He saw himself a hero, for his coach had been held up on the way and had escaped—by his own prowess.

That was the way he wanted it and so he would put it.

"Pards all, I was held up on the mountain by a gang of road agents, but pushed over one of them and here I am!"

So said Cal Kirby; but out of the coach sprang the paymaster.

His face was white with anger, and his eyes flashed as he cried, as soon as the cheer had subsided which greeted the driver's words:

"You infamous liar and coward, you ran off and left the brave man who came to our rescue to fight it out against the road-agents alone, after he had killed one."

"That man is a splendid driver, men, but he has no right to sit on a coach-box when he acts as he did to-day."

Cal Kirby was aroused terribly, but he did not draw at the angry words of the army officer.

Kirby was not "on the shoot" against one whom he saw meant all that he said.

So he replied doggedly:

"You army officers say what you please because the Government protects you; but if you was any one else, I'd—"

"Bah! you would not dare draw a weapon to use it."

"You are a coward, and you know it."

"Don't talk to me, for I am all out of patience with you, for the man you deserted was Buffalo Bill."

"Had I dared, I would have sprung from the coach and remained behind to aid him, but you were going at such a breakneck pace I would not risk it."

"Buffalo Bill, was it?" cried many voices.

"Yes, the chief of scouts at Fort Beauvoir, where I was stationed some months ago."

"Come, men! who will follow me back to the scene?"

A hundred voices answered with a ringing:

"I will!"

"Then get your horses, and I will secure a mount and lead you back to see if Buffalo Bill is dead or alive."

But it was an hour before all were in readiness to start, and then as the cavalcade got out on the trail, they beheld Buffalo Bill coming toward them at a canter, a led horse following with a dead body hanging across the saddle.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MET ON THE TRAIL.

"WHERE is Boss Bill?"

"Where is Boss Bill Brewer?"

These were the cries that went up on all sides as the men about the Overland Inn sought to secure horses on which to follow the brave paymaster back to the scene where Cal Kirby's coach had been held up.

Boss Bill was in charge of the Overland horses belonging to the Pony Express Company and coach line, and without his say-so they could not be taken out.

The Boss was known to be a great hunter, and the stablemen said that he was off on a hunt somewhere; but they dared not let the coach horses or Pony Express animals go out in his absence.

In vain the men pleaded, the stable-boys were firm.

"We knows Boss Bill, and don't you forgit it."

"If he was here, it would be all right; but if we let 'em go without his say-so, then when he come in he'd begin ter practice shootin' on us."

"Oh, we knows him, we does."

As the men thirsting to wade in road-agents' gore had no horses of their own, for outside of the coach and Pony Express animals, horses were scarce in Overland City, they did not know what to do, and went scouring over the place in search of something to ride.

In the mean time the paymaster had gone into the inn and called the landlord aside.

He asked for the man in charge of the coaches, and he was sent for.

It was Boss Bill, and he could not be found.

Then Paymaster Floyd informed the landlord that he had fifty thousand dollars in Government money in his keeping, and this had to be put away in a safe place.

This was done and a receipt given for it, after which the paymaster asked for a horse, on which to lead his band of volunteers to the rescue.

The landlord did not aspire to horsemanship.

Walking was good enough for him, and as he weighed nearly three hundred pounds, he did not, as a merciful man, feel that he had a right to keep a horse.

"Where can I get one?"

"If Boss Bill was here, at the Overland stables."

"Where is this man Boss Bill, as you call him?"

"Off on a hunt, the stable-boys say."

"Then I will take a horse."

But when the paymaster emerged into the open air he saw that his anticipated cavalry had degenerated into foot soldiers.

He belonged to the cavalry himself, and this would never do, so he demanded a reason.

He very soon got it in full, and with emphasis most decided against the stable-boys.

"I can fix that," he said. And he did, for, upon the authority of a United States officer he seized the stables of the Overland Company, and the volunteers were mounted forthwith.

There were, doubtless, a number in that motley gang who were outlaws, in hiding themselves, and regretted that they had not been along to rope in the paymaster; but under the garb of honest men they now went forth to capture the road-agents.

One and all had heard of Buffalo Bill, and many knew him, so that when the scout was discovered a wild yell went up from the crowd.

"Buffalo Bill, we were going to your aid," cried the paymaster.

"Paymaster Floyd, I am glad to see you indeed."

"It was you then that the road-agents were after?" said Buffalo Bill, as the paymaster ranged alongside and shook hands with him.

"Yes, but thanks to your coming I was not robbed, and I shall so report it at headquarters, Cody."

"I was asleep when the coach was halted, and awoke to find the door open and a revolver in my face."

"It was useless to kick or plead, I was caught, and the fellow knew that I carried big money, so I was forced to fork over."

"I delayed all I could, and I was hoping for aid, when lo! I heard a shot, and then the coach dashed off, knocking the masked leader down."

"I looked back and saw you, and alone."

"You took big chances, Bill."

"There were only two that I could see, Mr. Floyd, and though I got this one across the horse here, the other made good his escape."

"What a pity; but this one you certainly did get."

"Oh, yes, sir, he is all right, and when we get him up to the inn some one may be able to recognize him."

"Shall we ride back, sir, for I am tired, and hungry as a bear, having come in from Fort Beauvoir."

"Yes, we will go back at once; but how are all at the dear old fort?"

"All goes well, sir."

"And the lovely Mustang Madge, who is her latest victim?" and the paymaster sighed, for his was a case of unrequited love in that quarter.

"Miss Madge has the garrison on the string now, sir, and is getting more beautiful every day."

"She won a prize at shooting the day I left."

"Heaven bless her."

"So we all pray, sir; but who was the driver of that coach?"

"A man known as Calvin Kirby, one not used to outlaws."

"He is used to running, for if he didn't hoof it down that mountain I am a sinner."

"Why it was a wonder he did not break your neck and his own too."

"His would have been no loss, for I told him he was a coward."

"Then I need not do so, as I intended, or he may believe it," was the scout's cool rejoinder, just as they rode up to the door of the Overland Inn and were greeted with a wild hurrah for "Buffalo Bill the Prince of the Plains."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CAL KIRBY RECEIVES GOOD ADVICE.

UPON arriving at the Overland Inn Buffalo Bill at once secured rooms, while Paymaster Floyd was to take a stage eastward, the scout telling him that he believed there was no danger of another attempt to rob him, but if he wished he would escort him beyond the danger line.

But this the paymaster declined, and so started upon his way on the incoming coach from the northward, and aboard which he was glad to find several soldiers going East on furlough, and who would be a protection to him, and his money.

Calvin Kirby the driver had not gone on the hunt for the road-agents.

He dared not trust himself so far from civilization with a party of men who had seen him from his exalted pinnacle as a driver to a man accused of cowardice.

The more he regarded the situation in the light of what he had done the more he felt convinced that he had acted in a very shabby way.

"It'll stick to me unless I up and shoots the paymaster."

"That will square me with the boys, but then it might get my neck into a rope cravat."

"I'll see what Boss Bill Brewer has to say about it."

Kirby had gone to his room, after his denunciation by the paymaster, one of the best rooms in the inn too by the way, though that was not saying much in its favor.

He saw the road-agent hunters ride off, and was thinking of going out in search of Boss Bill when he heard a step go by his door.

The stable-master had a room beyond Kirby's, so he knew it must be he, and glad that he had not to go out and look him up, he at once went to his door and knocked.

"Come in," said a faint voice.

The stable-boss was there, his face dripping wet and pale, his eyes sunken, and his whole manner that of a man who had been in some trouble.

"It's you, is it, Kirby?" said the boss, not rising from his chair, and his hand resting as though by accident upon his revolver.

"Yes, boss, and I've come to have a talk with you; but what in thunder is the matter?"

"I was hunting, and a man told me there was trouble in Overland City, that the horses had all been taken from the coach stables, so I ran all the way here."

"Well, you look it; but it's only that infernal paymaster who took them, to go and hunt down the road-agents that attacked my coach."

"Ah! that is it, is it?"

"Yes."

"So your coach was held up, Kirby?" and the man breathed more freely.

"Yes, I should say it was."

"I have not been told this, but it is true I came right to my room."

"Tell me about it, Cal."

"Well, it was back on the mountain, twelve miles from here, that a gang of road-agents held me up."

"How many of them?"
 "Lord knows, but I counted half a dozen."
 "Yes."
 "And they went for the paymaster, as was inside and had lots of money."
 "Did they get it?"
 "No, for Buffalo Bill and his scouts came up and killed one man, so I drove on for all I was worth, not wishing the paymaster to be robbed."
 "The paymaster, as soon as I got here, said I was a liar and a coward, and I want to ask you if I had not better kill him to square myself with the boys?"
 "Did he say it to your face?"
 "Yes, and before the whole crowd who gave me the laugh, groan and hiss."
 "Because you ran off?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, Cal Kirby, I think the paymaster was so near right that as you did not resent it then, to do so now would get you lynched."
 "You did act in a mean way to desert your rescuer, and the only thing I can say for you to do is to take the first coach East, for you may be sure the boys won't let you live on the Overland Trail, and I'd change my name too, if I was in your place."
 "So you say I acted like a coward too?"
 "I say that you acted the part of a cowardly cur, and if you don't like my language resent it now, and not wait to shoot me in the back."
 "But I have given you good advice, and you had better take it."
 "I can get my money, I suppose?"
 "I'll give you an order on the Overland paymaster for your money, and a free ride back over the line."
 "Now go and get ready, Kirby, for if you stay here the boys will do you more harm, mark my words."
 "I'll go, you bet."
 "Well, come here soon and get your money order, and then light out down the trail to take the coach, for there will be trouble if you leave from the tavern."
 "I'll do it, and I rely upon you, boss, not to let them hunt me," said the cringing coward.
 "Do as I tell you then," and Boss Bill dismissed the man and then set to work to get himself into presentable shape.
 He had plunged through streams, slid down hills, gone through thickets at a run, and was tattered, wet, mud-covered and tired.
 But he put on some clean clothes after washing up, took a stiff drink of whisky and went down into the stable-yard where he was met by the paymaster and the men, who were returning the stage-horses pressed into service for the hunt after the road-agents.
 "Ho, Boss Bill, how are you, pard?" cried Buffalo Bill, and the station-master went forward to greet the scout, his heart and brain in a whirl, though he was outwardly calm.
 "I've got a dead man here, Boss Bill, whom the boys say is one of your stable-men," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the body across the horse and which the station-master approached in a timid sort of way.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WISE CAL KIRBY.

WHO can tell what were the feelings of Bill Brewer, as he moved up to the body of the man whom he had tempted to become his ally in an act of crime which had cost him his life?
 William Brewer was getting along in years, for his hair and beard were iron gray.
 He had long dwelt upon the frontier, and he had held a place of trust for many years, though he was known to be a dangerous man.
 What money he had accumulated he had sent East and bought the home where his old mother dwelt, and led into desperation by gambling he had mortgaged it to the landlord of the Overland Inn, who at last threatened to sell him out, unless it was paid.
 It was this situation which had driven him to rob the Government, and in the dead body of his comrade before him, and in the presence of Buffalo Bill, who knew his secret, he saw the result of his evil scheming.
 The stableman had once saved the life of Boss Bill, and he was greatly attached to him, and men spoke of "Andy Strong" as the "pet of Boss Bill."
 Now, every eye was upon him as he advanced and gazed into the dead face.
 He started back, for the open eyes glared into his own, when he removed the mask.
 He acted well his part, as Buffalo Bill thought, for the eye of the scout was upon him.
 "Andy Strong! what does this mean?" he cried excitedly.
 "It means, Boss Bill, that he was one of the road-agents that held Kirby's stage up in the mountains, for I killed him standing at the head of the leaders, his rifle covering the driver."
 "I shot him, but his comrade, or comrades, as the case may be, got away."
 "That is all there is to it, except that you had better muster your men, find out who is missing and make them give a strict account of their absence, for this looks bad."

"It does look bad, Buffalo Bill, and it is bad, very bad."
 "Tobe, call all the men together and I will see who is missing."
 "Then take this body away and have it buried."
 The men were mustered, those who were asleep being called out, too, and fortunate it was for them, not one was missing.
 Andy Strong had been the only black sheep in the band of forty odd stablemen.
 Night now came on, and in the saloons the holding up of the coach, the cowardice of Kirby, and treachery of Andy Strong filled every mouth.
 At last the east-bound coach came in, and the passengers took their leave, the paymaster going also and riding with the driver.
 Then, as the men had begun to drink heavily, mischief began to brew, and it was decided to take Calvin Kirby out and hang him.
 A coward could not be tolerated upon the Overland Trail.
 So the crowd, inspired by a drunken leader, made a rush for the room of Cal Kirby.
 The door was open, the room in disorder, and the driver was gone.
 The men were wild with rage, and sought Boss Bill for an explanation.
 He simply said that he wanted no such man in his employ, that in his fright he had driven his team to death, and so he had discharged him, while, fearing trouble, he supposed the man had gone down the valley to take the coach away from Overland City.
 The crowd then went howling away to see if Cal Kirby had really left the place, for they were on the war-path for blood and meant to have it.
 Finding that the driver had escaped them, they compromised by going to the cabin where Andy Strong's body lay, and taking it out, gave it a midnight burial, with "three cheers and a tiger" as a burial ceremony over the unfortunate stableman.
 They were determined to put down lawlessness in Overland City, they said, and after the burial they returned to the saloon and got drunk all around, ending up in a row that cost two lives and many hurts and swelled heads.
 In the mean time, a somewhat strange scene was going on in the private room of Landlord Lundy of the Overland Inn.
 That worthy had become a very rich man of late years, and the more wealth he got the more he wanted, until he became a perfect gouge and grasped at every means for getting gold, fair or foul.
 Buffalo Bill had known the man years before, and whatever the hold he had upon him, he determined to use it in behalf of Boss Bill Brewer.
 So he went to the stable-master's room, and said:
 "See here, Boss Bill, the talk I want with you cannot take place to-night, but when I leave to-morrow, you accompany me on the trail a few miles, for I have something to say to you of importance."
 "I will, Bill. I'll do anything you say."
 "Now let me tell you that I am superstitious on the point of good or bad luck."
 "You are?"
 "Yes."
 "How so?"
 "Well, I think that you were playing in great good luck to-day not to catch my bullet."
 "Oh, Bill!"
 "You got here on time, which was lucky, and you stood the ordeal well of facing Andy Strong's body."
 "My God!"
 "You were not taken out to-night and buried with Andy, and there your good luck came in again."
 "It did, indeed!"
 "Now, you are having a run of luck, and I wish to have you go with me to Landlord Lundy, and challenge him to play you three games for what he holds of yours."
 "But I have nothing to stake against it."
 "Give him your I. O. U., and I'll indorse it."
 "Come, let us see if your luck has deserted you."
 "He won't play."
 "He will," was Buffalo Bill's decided rejoinder.

CHAPTER XL.

LUCK.

LANDLORD LUNDY was seated in what he called his "parlor," when Buffalo Bill and Boss Bill knocked at his door.
 It was his parlor, bedroom and office combined, and it was arranged with a special view to his own protection in case of trouble.
 It was of logs and boarded without, while a tunnel ran from the cellar to a point some distance away, where the landlord had a pard ever ready to aid him.
 No one knew the ups and downs of life better than Landlord Luke Lundy.
 He was counting over his gold, a favorite amusement of his, when Buffalo Bill and the stable-master came.

But he had hastily put it away before admitting them, and had reconnoitered through a secret point of observation to see who were his visitors before doing so.
 "Sit down, Buffalo Bill, and you, too, Boss Bill, and we'll have a glass while you tell me what I can do for you," he said, getting out a decanter and glasses as he spoke.
 "The boys are on the war-trail hot to-night, for it's broke them all up to have Kirby show the cur and Andy Strong play the road-agent."
 "It hits you, too, rather hard, Boss Bill."
 "Yes, for I wish my men to go straight."
 "Here's to you, gents, and now say if you came for a social call or on business."
 Boss Bill looked at Buffalo Bill, and the latter said:
 "We came on a little matter of business, Lundy, for Boss Bill has been telling me how he got into a losing streak in gambling, and you won all he had laid up in years."
 "Yes, but he would not heed my warning and quit."
 "I never knew you to warn me, landlord, and you bought up every debt I owed any one else."
 "Yes, for they would have given you trouble—pressing you."
 "Yet you crowd me."
 "I've been awful patient, Boss Bill, for I've waited six months."
 "How much do you owe Luke Lundy, Boss Bill?"
 "He holds my house in Denver, my horses here, my watch and chain, and claims on three months wages in all."
 "What does it foot up?"
 "Well, the place is worth five thousand, the horses a thousand more, the watch and chain were given me by the drivers and cost five hundred, and there is three months pay at three hundred."
 "Nearly seven thousand dollars?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, play Luke Lundy for it now, best two in three games."
 "What has he got to put up against it?" asked the landlord.
 "His I. O. U."
 "It is no good."
 "I'll indorse it, Luke."
 "What's your interest in this game, Buffalo Bill?"
 "Oh, I have known Boss Bill for some time and don't wish to see him lose all without a chance to win it back."
 "He don't get it without putting up good money."
 "I said I would indorse his paper."
 "What have you got?"
 "Mighty little, it is true, besides my outfit and horses, and a few hundred in the paymaster's hands."
 "Then you indorse what is no good?"
 "I have the liberty, though, to draw on White Beaver Powell, if Boss Bill loses."
 The landlord started and his face changed color, but he said:
 "Well, I'll play, so come into the saloon."
 "No, the game is to be played right here."
 "Why?"
 "I prefer it."
 "I'll send for a pack of cards then."
 "No, for I have a pack here never opened."
 "I prefer my own pack."
 "I know that, but you do not play with any pack you may get."
 "Understand me, Luke Lundy, this is to be a square game."
 "What do you mean?"
 "Bahl! don't assume the virtuous, Lundy, for you know we were pards long ago, and I have a good memory, so do as I say or I will go out to my camp in the mountains and ask White Beaver Powell to come in and play a game with you."
 Whatever talisman there might be in the name of the Surgeon Scout, it had the effect of commanding obedience from Landlord Lundy, for with a muttered oath he sat down to the table, cleared a space and said gruffly:
 "Where are your cards?"
 "Here."
 "They are square?"
 "Oh, yes, for you have not had the handling of them."
 A muttered oath was the landlord's only reply, and seating himself at the table Boss Bill wrote out the I. O. U. and Buffalo Bill indorsed his name upon it with the following lines above it:
 "To be presented for payment to Doctor Frank Powell, 'White Beaver' the Surgeon Scout, in case it is not paid by William Brewer, 'Boss Bill.'"
 "That goes," said Buffalo Bill quietly, as the landlord glanced over it.
 He made no reply, but chewed his lips, and the cards were cut for a deal and dealt.
 "Best two in three, is it?"
 "Yes, landlord," answered Boss Bill.
 Both men were not ceasingly nervous, but the scout stood looking on unmoved.
 Boss Bill won the first game, and at once became perfectly calm, as Buffalo Bill remarked:
 "Your luck is good, Bill."
 But Landlord Lundy became the more nervous.

The second game Boss Bill won, and Landlord Luke gave a groan, while he said:

"This is robbery to force a man to play."

"It was played with unmarked cards, Lundy, and you have been the robber."

"Come, hand over the claim-papers and property of Boss Bill which you hold."

The landlord obeyed without a word, and rising, the two men left the room and went to their own.

"How did you control that tiger, Buffalo Bill, as you did?" asked the stable-master.

"Oh, I saved his neck once years ago, when he was caught cheating in the mines, and Doctor Powell knows a secret about him that would stretch his neck, that is all."

"And you have saved me, for I shall never touch a card again, or drink a drop of liquor."

"I am a new man, Buffalo Bill, and I owe it to you that I am," was Boss Bill's trembling reply.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHAT BOSS BILL HAD TO SAY.

THE morning after his strange adventures, Bill Brewer arose with a comparatively light heart.

It is true that his crime of holding up the coach weighed upon him, but he bitterly repented of that mad act, and had decided to lead a different life to atone for it.

He had his property back again, looked at his handsome watch and chain over and over again, in his joy at recovering them, went out to the stables and petted his horses and mailed East a deed to the little home, putting it in his mother's name.

He glanced wistfully at the bar, where he had always gotten his morning "eye-opener," then braced up courage and walked in.

"The same, Boss Bill?" asked Uncle Isaac the bartender.

"No, Uncle Ike, I won't try any thing this morning."

"My Lord! you hain't sick, be you?"

"No, but I've cut rum."

"Cut rum?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"Forever."

"So they all says."

"Well, see if I do not tell the truth," and with another wistful glance at Uncle Isaac and his tempting bottles Boss Bill passed on.

He met Landlord Lundy just outside, and said good-morning.

But the salutation was not returned, and then came gruffly:

"See here, Boss Bill, I've got parties as wants the room you have, so just vacate to-day."

"I shall be glad to, now I know what kind of a landlord I have had."

"But don't go too brisk, Luke, or the boys might hear a story I could tell."

"Go slow with me, and I keep a quiet tongue—see?"

The landlord evidently did see, for he said no more.

The stable-master breakfasted with Buffalo Bill, and told him how Andy Strong had been buried by the moral community of Overland City, and had finished up by causing two more funerals.

"I don't know any other life, Buffalo Bill, or I would leave it; but if I don't gamble and drink I can make money and lay it up, and in a couple of years or so will have enough to go home and care for the old lady."

"That is right, Bill, and I believe you will stick to your resolve."

"Now I must be off, and under pretense of visiting the scene of the road-agents' attack yesterday, go with me."

"I'll be ready, Buffalo Bill, in half an hour."

A crowd gathered around Buffalo Bill when he went out in front of the tavern after breakfast, and when soon after he rode off with Boss Bill, men wondered why Landlord Luke did not say good-morning.

"How far is your camp from here, Bill?"

"I have no camp nearer than Fort Beauvoir."

"Why, you said last night you would go to camp after Surgeon Powell?"

"That was a bluff."

"And it went."

"Oh, yes, I knew it would, for if there is a man on earth that Landlord Lundy fears it is Doctor Powell."

"But now, Boss Bill, I have got some questions to ask you, so let us halt here."

They did so, and Buffalo Bill got out his notebook and pencil.

"You were wagon-master for Granger Goldhurst, a settler, years ago?"

"Yes."

"How was it?"

"He came West, as I remember it, with his family."

"How many?"

"His wife, little child, and wife's younger brother, a handsome and fine fellow, of sixteen, I guess."

"That was all?"

"There were two negroes, a man and a woman."

"Well?"

"He came in one coach with them, and other coaches and an ambulance brought his baggage and provisions, and he had plenty of it."

"I remember too, there were some cattle, sheep, fowls, and all else to make them comfortable."

"And then?"

"They stayed several days at the station where I then had charge, Medicine Mound, you know it was, and he hired some men to go with him, cowboys up from Texas they were."

"Yes."

"And he engaged me and an outfit of wagons to take them to their new home."

"And you did so?"

"I did."

"Well?"

"We were a week on the trail, and he acted as guide, for he had been to the settlement and bought a ranch there, and a good one, for I was surprised at it when I saw it."

"Did you get well acquainted with his family?"

"You bet I did, and they were just as nice people as I ever saw."

"What about his wife?"

"She was a beauty, and very young."

"She was a Southern lady, she told me, a planter's daughter."

"And the child?"

"Was a smart little one."

"What was its name?"

"They called it only baby, as I recollect."

"And the boy?"

"Her brother?"

"Yes."

"They called him Hugh, I think."

"And her name?"

"His wife."

"Yes."

"Her husband called her Lucille, as I remember, and I now recall, she said her name was Lucille Hubbard, and she was so neat, so good, all of us loved her and the baby too."

"You knew nothing of Mr. Goldhurst?"

"Only what he told me, that he was an Englishman, had been a soldier and a sailor, and was in the mines out here for awhile."

"Then he became a settler."

"Have you heard from them since?"

"I heard that the Indians raided the valley, and killed all the settlers, and mighty sad I felt over it."

"Well, Boss Bill, I thank you for what you have told me, and if I have to send for you I wish you to come, for it will be important."

"I'll come, Buffalo Bill, if you say the word, for never will I forget you," and tears came into eyes that had not known a tear since childhood.

Soon after the two parted, the stable-master to return to Overland City, and Buffalo Bill to start for the fort, pleased with what he had accomplished.

CHAPTER XLII.

SKELETON GAP.

BUFFALO BILL parted with Boss Bill Brewer with a firm belief in his reformation and honesty of purpose.

He saw that the narrow escape he had made had been a great shock to him, and would make a lasting impression.

He wished to feel that the man would not go astray again.

Having accomplished the purpose of his errand, gleaned all the information he could from the man who had taken Granger Goldhurst to his frontier home, he felt that there was little more to do.

That both Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder were mistaken about Granger Goldhurst never having married, he was now convinced, for the wagon-master had told a very conclusive story on that point.

"I will hurry back, for I will have a couple of days' rest at the fort, I guess, before starting for Massacre Valley," said the scout to himself, and he pressed on more rapidly.

He wished to camp but once on the way, reaching the fort the next night.

Taking advantage of mountain cuts, he shortened his way, and by walking up and down the mountains, thus resting his horse, he made rapid progress.

He did not camp until some time after nightfall, and broke camp very early in the morning, so that he was well on his way when dawn came.

At noon he halted for an hour, for he saw that at the rate he was going he would reach the fort by dark, if his horse did not give out.

But the animal was a fine one, and spared all that was possible by his rider, he held on pluckily.

The trail he took back was over the trail partly, which he had come, especially as he neared the fort.

The sun was yet above the horizon when he crossed the river at the ford above Ranch Isle, and he gazed at the place with considerable interest, even putting his glass to his eyes.

Ranch Isle had always been a place of interest to the scout, in that he looked upon Mrs.

Bond, her daughter and the cowboys that dwelt there as a very mysterious party.

"They are a queer outfit, and somehow I cannot get at bed-rock as to what and who they just are," muttered the scout.

To cut off a mile he turned into a canyon which was shunned by all who were at all superstitious.

Even the plucky Belle of the Border had said she would not go through there even in daylight, and Don Eduardo Vincente confessed that he always shunned the place.

Texas Jack was a scout known to have no fear, but what he had seen one night in the Skeleton Gap, as the canyon was called, caused him to avoid the place ever after.

"I am not afraid of live men, but I draw the line at dead men, when I see skeletons dancing in the moonlight, and that is what I did see, pards."

"You know when I got to the fort I was scared clean through, and my horse had been run to death."

So had said Texas Jack, and it was useless to tell him some one had played a joke on him.

"I saw what I saw, and I know a picked skeleton from one with human flesh on it," he would answer.

And if a man of Texas Jack's pluck would avoid the Skeleton Gap, after that the other scouts of the command religiously did the same.

"We'll ride round, for we don't mind cutting off a couple of miles or so," they would say when told to go through the Gap.

Buffalo Bill had gone through by day and night, several times, but he admitted that it was a most desolate place.

The soldiers avoided it too, and as for the cowboys and settlers they never had business to call them in that direction.

The gap, or canyon, had its unwritten history, and a sad one it was.

A train of emigrants had been caught there by the Indians and put to death.

They were a jolly party, and they were enjoying a dance by the light of the camp-fires, when the attack was made.

The violin and banjo were silenced, the voices of the dancers and laughter of children, as a volley of bullets and shower of arrows came in upon the happy group.

Then followed the wild war-whoops, and though men fought bravely for life and all they loved and possessed, they sunk down under the attack of the outnumbering foe.

The morning's sun arose before a sickening, sad scene, and there lay the massacred emigrants, some forty in number, until the coyotes and vultures picked their bones, and left them to whiten upon the death-stained sod.

Years after, Captain Taylor's troop of the Fifth Cavalry, scouting to find a good place for a frontier fort, and under the guidance of Buffalo Bill, came upon the spot and decently buried the bones of the dead.

With such a memory haunting the spot, with the stories told of the canyon, it was no wonder that all avoided it.

Captain Taylor had given it the name of Skeleton Gap, and had erected there a monument of stone over the dead.

Then the troop had gone on to pitch upon the spot where Fort Beauvoir was afterward located.

But unheeding its memories, unmindful of the ghost stories told of it, Buffalo Bill had decided to cut off a couple of miles and go through Skeleton Gap to the fort.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A SECOND MEETING.

SKELETON GAP was a wild-looking place, weird in its surroundings and solitude, as well as in its memories.

There was one thing that might have influenced Buffalo Bill in going through that way to the fort, and that was a fresh trail that he saw.

It turned from the main trail toward Skeleton Gap, and was the trail of a horse ridden in a canter.

It was a surprise to see the trail going that way, and so Buffalo Bill followed it.

Leaving the prairie-lands, he got into the foothills, then came to rugged country and the ridge which the Gap cut through.

The trail still held on toward the Gap, and the scout stuck to the trail.

On he went until the country grew more rugged, and the ridge tops were fringed with pines, and all around was desolation.

The unfortunate victims of the massacre had without doubt penetrated there to seek a good and safe encampment, but which, alas, proved their charnel camp.

The scout noticed as he rode along that the trail he followed, though very fresh, was pursuing the tracks of other horses, which had often gone that way.

"This is strange," he muttered.

"Can any one live in the Skeleton Gap, I wonder?"

The sun had set to him down in the valley,

but upon the hill-tops its golden light shone brightly.

"I shall reach the fort a little after dark," he said.

At last the valley narrowed, and he soon found himself under the shadows of the cliffs which formed Skeleton Gap.

It looked gloomy ahead of him, and he saw the spot where the emigrant train had encamped, and he recalled the time of his first coming there, and the horror of all at the discovery of the skeleton forms of the dead.

The stone pile, made in the form of a cross, lying upon the ground, was just before him, not far from a spring, where he was going to give his horse a drink.

A thick growth of pines surrounded the spring and he could not see through them.

The soil beneath the hoofs of his horse left no sound, and the scout muttered, as he glanced about him:

"It is indeed a spooky-looking place.

"If it was dark now, I might get a look at the skeleton dance that Texas Jack saw.

"They sell some awful snaky liquor over at the store in the settlement, but I don't see how it could make Jack see a skeleton fandango.

"I'd like to see one myself, for it would be a new sensation to behold a Virginia reel danced by skeletons under the shadow of the cliffs at the spring.

"There goes the trail, straight for the spring, and it was not made by a skeleton horse, I will take oath on.

"Well, I must know who it is that is not afraid to associate with skeletons, and to come here often from the trails— Ah!"

He drew rein suddenly as he uttered the exclamation, and had his rifle ready for use on the instant.

But he slung it to his back again immediately and rode on, for he saw that he was discovered.

"Their second meeting that I have caught them in," he muttered, as he raised his hat and said aloud:

"This is an unlooked-for pleasure, Miss Bessie, as well as a surprise, to find you and Don Eduardo here, for I thought you both were afraid of Skeleton Gap."

The faces of the man and woman showed deepest chagrin at their discovery by the scout.

They were seated upon the rock monument to the massacred emigrants, while their horses were feeding near.

They had seen the scout about an instant after his discovery of them, and they seemed speechless with amazement and anger.

But in response to the words of Buffalo Bill came the woman's ready answer:

"It is a surprise to see you also, Buffalo Bill, but I am glad you have come, for I want you as a witness."

"A witness to what, Miss Bessie?"

"Why, Don Eduardo made a wager with me, of his beautiful iron-gray mustang, that I would not come here alone at night and place my glove among those rocks as a proof of my being here, and he to come and find it."

"And you have come?"

"You see me."

"Yes, but it is not yet dark."

"True, but I intended to place the glove in the spot for myself, and wait until night before I left."

"Yes, and I have lost my horse, for Miss Bessie has certainly done what I did not believe she would, brave as she is."

"I could have told you, Don Eduardo, Miss Bessie would not take a dare; but you seemed doubtful of her coming, to be here to watch her."

"Yes, wasn't that mean, for while I was waiting he rode up, and you should have seen the Don's sheepish look when he saw me here."

"I am so glad that I have you as a witness, Buffalo Bill, for now he will have to give me the iron-gray mustang."

"Yes, Don, I am a witness that she came."

"I'll surrender, the horse is yours, Miss Bessie," said the Don, while Bessie Bond asked:

"And how on earth came you here, Buffalo Bill, for I thought every one dreaded this spot?"

"We all do, Miss Bessie, but I am just back from a long scout, and, as you see, my horse is broken down, so I wished to save him two miles by cutting through the Gap as it was not dark."

"Well, I must return home, and Don, as you go to the fort, you will have company."

"Will you not allow me to escort you?" seniorita?

"No, I never do."

"Good-night, gentlemen," and springing into her saddle the strange girl darted away like an arrow.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE RIDE TO THE FORT.

BUFFALO BILL was too true a reader of human nature not to see that his coming was a source of deepest regret as well as anger to both Don Eduardo Vincente and Bessie Bond.

He saw their faces pale and flush with the emotion they felt at his surprise of them.

The maiden had shown instant tact in turning

it off as she had, that she had come there on a wager, and then the man had seconded her in her clever ruse.

But the scout had muttered to himself:

"They lied to me before."

Not a shadow showed that he had other belief but that they had come as stated.

His manner was pleasant, and he had laughed over the wager and joked the Don upon betting upon anything a woman should not do.

"My experience has been, Don Eduardo, not to bet with a woman or dare one."

"You'll get left every time."

"Miss Bessie too is the last one to bet against, where her courage is taken into consideration, for she would tackle a bag full of wild-cats."

As they rode toward the fort together, Buffalo Bill could see that the Don was trying to regain his equanimity.

Something had evidently upset him, to move him from the even tenor of his manners, his cool, suave way.

Pretending not to notice this, Buffalo Bill chatted on, which he suddenly broke off by saying:

"You see, Don Eduardo, my horse is used up, so please do not let me delay you, if you care to ride on more rapidly."

"No indeed, for I like your company, Cody."

"You must have ridden a long way."

"I have, sir, since I met you on the trail the other day, and you know after leaving you I saw trails I could not account for, and as Miss Bessie had gone on alone I was anxious about her, so went by her ranch; but found her all right."

"She's a strange little lady, Don Eduardo, for she never receives company at her home."

"Yes, I have never been invited there myself; but it is her mother's wish I believe; but did you think the trails you saw might be Indians?"

"I did not know, sir, but thought it best to be on the safe side."

"Always! but you have seen nothing suspicious in your scouting?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Did you go far?"

"Yes, sir, I went to Overland City," was the frank reply.

"It's a long ride and you made it quickly."

"Yes, sir."

"Did not stay long?"

"No, sir, for my business was soon transacted, for you know the Pony Express Riders start from there," and Buffalo Bill led the Don to believe he had taken special documents from the colonel, to be sent by the Pony Express Riders.

"Oh, yes, and it's a quick way of sending news through, but nothing serious I hope?"

"No, sir, I guess not, though you know a dispatch-carryer is never let into the secrets of the commanding officer."

"I thought you were an exception?"

"Oh, no, sir, though Colonel Loyal and all of his officers treat me as though I held a commission, for they are very kind to me."

"I am glad to see it, and the ladies like you, too, in fact you are a very popular man, Buffalo Bill," and the scout raised his hat at the compliment.

He had gotten the Don at his ease now, and felt sure that he had disarmed him of every suspicion of his having been watching him, when he went into Skeleton Gap.

A desolate place that Skeleton Gap, Senior Cody, suddenly said Don Eduardo Vincente, his thoughts reverting to his being discovered there with Bessie Bond.

"It is indeed, sir, and a place I would shun by night."

"You surely do not believe the stories told of its being haunted?"

"Do you, Don Eduardo?" asked Buffalo Bill, in a mysterious way.

"Well, I hardly know what to think."

"You are superstitious then, sir?"

"You know I come of a superstitious race, Senior Cody, and I have heard people whom I dared not doubt, say what they had seen in the way of ghosts; but then I try not to believe such stories, and yet—"

"Well, Don Eduardo?" asked Buffalo Bill, as the Mexican paused in what he was about to say.

"I was going to remark, senior, that I would not care to go alone to that place after nightfall."

"It was from this reason that I felt sorry I had done that which might make that brave girl go, and so I went before nightfall to pass through and head her off, telling her I gave up the wager."

"But there I found her, as cool as you please, and not in the least ruffled, though I admit it was not nightfall."

"She would not have cared for that, sir, for I do not believe she knows what it is to fear."

"That is my opinion, Cody, and she is a very clever girl, beautiful, accomplished, and a mystery, for I cannot understand her."

"No one else does either, sir."

"True, very true; but my opinion is that she has had some great heart trouble, and that was why her mother brought her here to these wilds,

and she has become as reckless as a cowboy over it."

"She does not seem to be at all times happy, sir."

"No, she does not, and I only wish she would fall in love with some nice fellow and marry, for it would make her life a happy one."

"Perhaps, sir, though it depends a great deal upon the man, and she is one to have strong preferences."

"Have you noticed this, Cody?" quickly asked the Don.

"Well, yes, sir, though perhaps I should not say so."

"Will you tell me the one you supposed her most partial to?"

"Pardon me, Don Eduardo, for saying so, but I considered you to be her favorite," and the scout smiled grimly, for it was night now, and the Don could not see his face.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE PAYMASTER'S LETTER.

THE Don was silent at the words of the scout, and as the fort lights were now in sight, Buffalo Bill changed the subject.

Soon after they rode into the stockade walls, for the Don was going to the Officers' Club, and not to his own quarters toward the settlement.

The scout rode to his own quarters, looked well after his horse, and then brushing off the dust of travel, and making his toilet, he went to report his return to Colonel Loyal.

"Well, Cody, glad to see you back again; but did you reach Overland City," said the colonel.

"Yes, sir, I passed some eighteen hours there."

"A quick trip you made of it, indeed."

"You must be tired, so sit down."

The scout was tired, and accepted the invitation.

"Did you find your man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Our English friends will be glad of this."

"Have you seen them?"

"No, sir, I came first to report to you."

"They are spending the evening at Chaplain Burton's, for both seem deeply interested in the Daughter of the Fifth; but they will have to become American citizens, and join the Fifth as privates, if they wish to win her," and the colonel laughed.

"Yes, sir, and it would tax a man's love rather strong to give up rank and wealth for a lady-love."

"She would be sure at least he was in earnest; but is your news for Lord Lonsfield and Sir John important enough for me to send after them to come here?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"I saw Boss Bill, and took down in my notebook all that he said."

"He did take Mr. Goldhurst to the settlement, then?"

"Yes, sir, and told me much about Mr. Goldhurst and his family."

"It was the same man?"

"Without doubt, sir."

"He must have been married, then?"

"He was, sir."

"Well, I'll hear it all later, so now tell me if you have any news to report outside of your mission?"

"I sent you dispatches, sir, by Pony Rider."

"Thank you."

"And now I have a report to make, sir."

"I am ready to hear it, Cody."

"Colonel Loyal, I have to take you into my confidence, and make known to you a secret you will not be supposed to know."

"Well?"

"I feel that you will hold my confidence, sir, and I trust you will feel that I have acted for the best."

"But I deem it my duty to tell you the truth, and will ask you to kindly allow me to manage the affair as I have begun, and as I deem best."

"I rely sufficiently upon your honor and discretion, Cody, to make you such a promise, and I do."

"Thank you, Colonel Loyal, for your words remove a load from my mind, as I did not wish to hold a secret in which I had taken the grave responsibility of allowing a guilty man to escape punishment."

"Ah! so serious as that?"

"You shall hear, sir, the whole truth, and if you decide that I have not overstepped my authority, I feel that you will consider the secret as unknown to you."

"I will not go back on my word to you, Cody."

"I feel that, sir, and I feel the greater boldness to make the request, as I have saved the Government a large sum in money."

"That is good news, and you are always rendering the Government valuable service, I am glad to say, Cody."

"Here is a letter, sir, given me by Paymaster Floyd for you."

"Ah! you saw Floyd, then?"

"Yes, sir, I was so fortunate."

The colonel took the letter and hastily read it. It was as follows:

"I beg to report to you that upon the morning of the 10th, the coach in which I was a passenger was

held up by road-agents in the mountains twelve miles from Overland City, and they, having knowledge of my carrying with me a large sum of Government money, I was being forced to yield it up at the muzzle of a revolver, when, I am pleased to report that Buffalo Bill came to the rescue alone, though not knowing the odds he had to face.

"He shot down one of the robbers at the head of the horses, when the cowardly driver dashed away, in spite of my commands and entreaties to him to stop, and left Cody to his fate.

"The fellow never drew rein until he reached Overland City, going at breakneck speed and killing his team.

"I seized the horses at the Overland stables in the name of the Government, and with a number of ready volunteers started out to the scene, but met Cody coming in with the dead outlaw hanging across his saddle.

"Cody will himself report to you what followed after his arrival upon the scene, and through which daring act the Government moneys were saved, and perhaps my life.

"I have the honor to be, etc."

Such was the letter of the paymaster, who was a man well known to the colonel, and one who he knew had made no exaggerated report of what had occurred.

The colonel read the letter through most carefully, and when he had finished it looked up at the scout and said:

"You took big chances, Cody, to run on a party you did not know the strength of."

"I but saw that the coach was held up, and trusted in a surprise to put the outlaws to flight, sir."

"Fortunately your confidence met with success, and I congratulate you upon your nerve and achievement.

"But you have a report to make to me I believe."

"Yes, sir, I have," was the reply of Buffalo Bill, and he began his story at once.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE REPORT.

BUFFALO BILL began his report to the colonel in a low, modest tone.

He knew that he had to make a confession which would show that he had assumed considerable authority, but he believed that he had acted for the best.

How the colonel would regard it remained to be seen.

"I arrived on the stage trail, sir," he began, "just after the coach had gone by, for I could hear the rumbling of the wheels.

"The trail wound just there, forming quite a bend, and I heard the order of the road-agents to the driver to halt.

"I at once spurred to the scene, and the ground being soft, my approach was unheard, so I ran in on the outlaws, dropping one with a shot.

"The starting of the coach knocked the other down with the open door of the stage, and this gave me a chance to rush on him before he could fire upon me.

"I saw no more than the two and they were masked.

"Unmasking my prisoner I found, to my amazement he was the very man I was going to see."

"What! the wagon-master?"

"Yes, sir, it was Boss Bill, and this is my secret.

"He recognized me as I did him, and then we had a talk together.

"He was thoroughly repentant—"

"Doubtless," dryly said the colonel.

"He was in earnest, sir, and told me how he had gambled away his entire earnings, and his home where his old mother lived in Iowa.

"He had tried to get time from the landlord of the inn, at Overland City, and failing, in his despair, knowing of the coming of Paymaster Floyd, and thinking he could rob the Government where he would not an individual, he was tempted, led one of his men to join him, and the result I have told you.

"I was in a quandary, for if taken to Overland City he would be lynched, and I would thus fail to get from him the news I might."

"That was true, Cody."

"So I took chances, sir, and told him to cut for Overland City on foot, as he had not come mounted, when his comrade had, and to meet me there.

"I told him I would keep his secret, if he did as I demanded, and hunt him down if he failed me.

"He promised, and kept his word, for I met him there.

"I reported only the killing of one outlaw, and that the other got off, which was true, sir."

"Yes, and lucky for him that he did."

"Well, colonel, the paymaster left on the east-bound train, and Kirby, the coward driver, too, for the boys intended to swing him up.

"But they failed to find him, so buried the dead outlaw by night, had a row in which several were killed, and the town was painted red."

"I should think so."

"In the mean time I sought Boss Bill and had a talk with him, and we went to Landlord Lundy's private room and I made him play the sta-

tion-master for all he had won from him, best two in three games."

"You forced him to play?"

"Well, sir, I knew him as a card-sharp in the mines, and that he had cheated there, playing with marked cards, and was a man who I was sure had swindled Boss Bill.

"As he played with a pack of cards I furnished, he lost his nerve and the games."

"And Boss Bill?"

"He swore off from cards and liquor, sir, and I believe will keep his pledge; but if not, my pledge to him does not hold good.

"The next morning he rode some distance on the trail with me, and I learned all the information I wished about Mr. Goldhurst.

"Now, Colonel Loyal, it is for you to say, sir, if I overstepped my authority in what I did?"

"Well, Scout Cody, I can only say that I would have done just as you did under the circumstances, and I only hope your man will prove his appreciation of your kindness toward him.

"I shall not consider the secret as told to me, but if that man Boss Bill does fall from grace, it will be well to remind him that his remaining at large depends upon his conduct."

"I will, sir, but I have faith in him."

"I hope it will not prove misplaced.

"Now I will send Paymaster Floyd's report to the commanding general of the department, and you will at least receive honorable mention in special orders for the services rendered.

"Now you had better get your supper and rest, for you can report to Lord Lonsfield in the morning, and I suppose that he and Sir John will wish to start soon upon the search for their kinsman, or his grave, and you are to guide them."

"It would be well, sir, to send an escort along, for it is near the Indian country."

"Yes, Captain Taylor, Lieutenant Onderdonk, a sergeant, corporal, and twenty-four men will go, and Surgeon Powell will be also along, for I know what a powerful ally he is of yours."

"With such an escort, sir, we need have no fear of raiding bands of Indians."

"Yes, if our British friends got scalped I fear it would be a *casus belli* with England, as it might be said as republicans we were trying to destroy their nobility.

"But they are royally good fellows both of them, Cody."

"They are indeed, sir, and I am glad to do all I can for them."

"As I am, and I hope their visit here will be crowned with success.

"As I will see the gentlemen to-night, I will tell them I sent you to bed, for I can see that you need rest badly," and the colonel extended his hand in good-night, for he had a great admiration and sincere friendship for the handsome and manly scout.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SEARCH TO BE MADE.

BUFFALO BILL was very willing to take the colonel's advice and go to his quarters for the night.

He had been constantly in the saddle for days, had had little rest the night he was at Overland City, and at his camp on the way back, so even his iron frame was worn out.

Eating a hearty supper, he retired, and was soon as sound asleep as a child, for within the fort he could dismiss all cares and fears, while without he had to sleep with an eye open as it were and every sense on the alert.

When he awoke in the morning Buffalo Bill found slipped under his door two cards, one bearing a coat of arms, the other a crest. One card read:

"LORD LUCIEN LONSFIELD,

Colonel British Hussars.

"Wildwood Manor."

Upon the reverse side was written:

"Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder desire the pleasure of (Chief of Scouts) Cody to breakfast with them at ten in their quarters."

The other card read:

"SIR JOHN REEDER, Baronet,

Captain British Hussars.

"Dangerfield Hall."

"I shall accept the invitation, for it is a kindness I appreciate," said Buffalo Bill, and at the appointed hour he was about to leave his quarters when Surgeon Powell called.

"Ho, Bill, glad to see you back again.

"I saw the colonel last night and he told us of your saving Floyd.

"You were in luck; but come, you are going with me to breakfast with Lord Lonsfield and Sir John, and Captain Taylor and Onderdonk are to be there, so you will meet only the best of good fellows.

"Are you ready?"

"I am, and I feel like a morning glory, for I put in just ten hours of gilt-edged slumber last night."

"You needed it, I am sure," and the two pards walked off together.

The quarters assigned the two Englishmen by Colonel Loyal, were about the pleasantest in the fort, a snug cabin with five rooms, well furnished and with a piazza across the front and rear.

Lord Lonsfield and Sir John met them at the door, and greeted Buffalo Bill as they would a dear friend, and Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk also welcomed him warmly, the former saying:

"You had a little war-path all to yourself, Bill, the colonel said?"

"Yes, sir, it looked like war for a minute, and I guess Paymaster Floyd was glad of reinforcements."

"You just should have heard him yell, pray and swear at the driver as he ran away, hoping to come back some other day and fight it out, at least it looked to me as though that was what he was going for."

"It is a wonder Floyd did not shoot him."

"I think he would have done so, had he not expected to wreck the whole outfit and kill himself."

"It would have done you good to see the regiment he raised to come out and rescue me."

"They were nearly all drunk, and were mounted upon the coach horses and Express ponies, with and without saddles and bridles."

"But they meant well, and Paymaster Floyd seemed proud of being in command of a brigade."

"A brigade?"

"Well, then, half a dozen of them calling each other colonel, and nearly all the rest were captains."

"I only wish you could have seen them."

"I only wish we could."

"They kept celebrating my rescue—"

"Your rescue?"

"Yes, sir, for they found me in half a mile of Overland City, and they celebrated all night, hunted for the driver of the coach to promote him—to a tree—buried with great relish the dead outlaw, and then provided grave fruit for a funeral next day."

"Overland City is a great place when it gets started."

All laughed at Buffalo Bill's story of his experiences and then sat down to breakfast.

As the best cook in the fort, Chips, a negro chef, had been detailed to care for the two Englishmen during their stay, the breakfast was something to remember, and all enjoyed it hugely, Lord Lonsfield and Sir John being surprised and delighted to discover in the scout a most charming dinner companion, for he told a good story, was very witty and had a dry humor that seems a part of the nature of men brought up in wild life on the plains.

The breakfast being over, and cigars lighted, Lord Lonsfield said:

"I wish to say now that our little group here are the ones that are to go upon this search after Granger Goldhurst, whose name has now become so familiar to you all, through Sir John and myself digging it in your ears."

"The colonel has kindly allowed Captain Taylor, Lieutenant Onderdonk, Surgeon Powell and twenty-four men of the captain's troop, with two non-commissioned officers to accompany us."

"As Chips and a comrade are also to go with us with a number of pack-animals, we will form a very imposing cavalcade."

"You are only to say the word, Lord Lonsfield, when you wish to start, for we will all be ready," Captain Taylor said.

"I well know that, captain; but now we must hear the report of our friend Cody on his mission."

"Certainly, sir," and taking out his note-book Buffalo Bill read the questions put to Boss Bill Brewer by him, and the answers to them.

"There is no doubt as to the person being Granger Goldhurst, gentlemen, for of that we are assured; but we cannot, Sir John Reeder and I, understand about our kinsman's family."

"Still there is no reason why it should not be so."

"Now suppose we say, start on the second day from this?"

This time seemed satisfactory to all, and arrangements were to be at once made for the starting on the trail of the Lost Heir to an English title and estates.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A SURPRISE ALL AROUND.

THERE was a surprise for the breakfast party at the English officers' quarters, as they were leaving, for an orderly approached with a note from Colonel Loyal, which was addressed to Lord Lonsfield, and which was as follows:

"MY DEAR LORD LONSFIELD:—

"A cowboy has just arrived from Ranch Isle, bearing a letter to me from Miss Bessie Bond, which states that her mother and herself desire the pleasure of the company of the officers of the fort, from the colonel down, and the ladies of the garrison as well, at what she is pleased to term a Lasso Tournament."

"The Lasso Tournament is to be held at Ranch Isle, in a large meadow, where the lariats will have full play, and the horses to be caught are half a hundred wild mustangs on the place."

"Miss Bessie particularly desires me to extend a special invitation to yourself and Sir John Reeder."

and to Buffalo Bill, who is known to be a good lassoist, and not to forget Don Eduardo Vincente.

"Her letter is for inspection should you call, and I would urge that all accept, as it is for to-morrow afternoon, a lunch at one o'clock being first in order."

"She speaks of Miss Madge, Miss Caro Sidway and herself as lady lasso-throwers, who will be sure to enter the lists, and of Surgeon Powell, Buffalo Bill, Don Eduardo Vincente, and Lieutenant Onderdonk as noted lariatists, and proposes a match of Ranch Isle against the fort throwers, as she has as guests a famous Mexican mustanger and a Texan ranchero, whom with herself she will put against the contingent from the garrison."

"It will be a novel affair, and we will all get a glimpse into that *terra incognita* Ranch Isle, while you and Sir John will have an opportunity of witnessing the catching of wild horses."

"Under the circumstances, kindly notify me at once of your acceptance, for I am sending around invitations, that I may notify Miss Bessie by the return of her courier."

"I have the honor to be,

"Sincerely yours,
LOYAL."

"Of all things just the thing to enjoy," cried Surgeon Powell, when Lord Lonsfield had read the note aloud.

"I shall at once accept, Sir John, without consulting you," and Lord Lonsfield turned to his desk.

"No need to, for I accepted before you got further in the colonel's note than Ranch Isle—" was the answer.

"And accept for all of us present, please, Lord Lonsfield," Lieutenant Onderdonk remarked.

This was done, and the orderly dispatched with the note, when Surgeon Powell said:

"See here, Miss Bessie offers to match herself and her two friends against the fort contingent, but this is hardly fair, for we outnumber them, so I propose that as Don Eduardo Vincente is a Mexican, and a noted hand with the lariat, he join the Ranch Isle force, which will give Miss Bessie and three men against our side, for Miss Caro Sidway will not ride, as her father forbade her doing so again, but Miss Madge will do so, and that makes up our side, with Onderdonk, Buffalo Bill and myself, and I know that Captain Taylor will hustle round and raise a purse for a prize to the winners to have badges made."

"What do you all say?"

This plan was received with a shout, and seizing a piece of paper, Captain Taylor wrote his name at the head, and opposite to it the magic words:

"Twenty dollars."

"Is that the limit?" asked Lord Lonsfield, with a smile, as he took up the pen.

"It will be enough, for all will chip in, my lord, and we will get a handsome purse," said Captain Taylor, and he went out of the quarters with six names signed, with the same sum written after each.

Going to Colonel Loyal's quarters he made his suggestion, and it was readily entered into, and having signed his name to the subscription, Colonel Loyal said:

"I will at once send for Don Eduardo, make the suggestion, and appoint him to carry our challenge from our champions to the fair Border Belle and hers."

Don Eduardo soon put in an appearance, and having heard the letter read, and the proposition that he should ride with the Ranch Isle lasso-throwers readily agreed, and consented to be the bearer of the acceptance of the invitation back to Ranch Isle, though he said:

"We must insist also upon signing the subscription list, as well as you of the fort, so I will put down for Ranch Isle, including Mrs. and Miss Bond, their two guests, our quota of one hundred dollars."

This was agreed to, and soon after Don Eduardo started for Ranch Isle.

He had hardly more than gotten out of sight when Buffalo Bill mounted his horse and followed him, merely remarking to Surgeon Powell:

"I wish to see which trail the Don takes to Ranch Isle."

"You are playing some game in that quarter, Bill."

"No, only getting the cards ready to play, White Beaver," was the reply.

In the mean while the whole fort was agog with excited surprise.

An invitation to Ranch Isle was something long since given up as an impossibility.

Of course, they would accept, ladies, children and all, and the trouble would be to find officers enough to leave at the fort during the day for duty.

Those who were to be on duty on the morrow were as blue as indigo, while those who were not thanked their lucky stars that they were free to accept.

Ambulances were gotten out of the sheds, and all was preparation for the morrow, while Mustang Madge, Surgeon Powell, and Lieutenant Onderdonk adjourned to the plains and began to get their hands in in turning the rope, for the fort must not be beaten in the contest.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE THIRD MEETING.

BUFFALO BILL had noticed the cowboy, who had brought Bessie Bond's letter, as one he had seen on the ranch before.

If he was not mistaken he was the one who had been called Half-Breed Harry, by the three men whom he had met on the trail, and who had accused him of robbing them and getting away.

"I don't think there can be two Half-Breed Harrys, and if not, then they caught him, but did not punish him very severely for robbing them," said the scout.

Then he saw the cowboy ride from the fort over to the settlement, and he asked the sentinel to direct him to the quarters of Don Eduardo Vincente.

"What did he ask you, sentinel?" questioned Buffalo Bill, when the cowboy had ridden away.

"How to find Don Eduardo the Mexican gentleman's quarters, sir."

So Buffalo Bill placed himself in the way of the cowboy upon his return and called out:

"Ho, Half-Breed Harry, how are you, pard?"

"Me don't know senor," said the cowboy, drawing rein.

"You are Half-Breed Harry, are you not?"

"Yes, senor."

"I thought so, for I have seen you before."

"Have a cigar, pard?" and handing the man a cigar Buffalo Bill went on his way up to headquarters, where he said to the orderly:

"If that Ranch Isle cowboy asks you who I am, Maloney, tell him I am Texas Jack."

"Yis, I'll do it, sur, lie though it be, for it's afther being my pleasure to sarve yez, Mister Bill," was the answer.

Ten minutes after, when the orderly gave the cowboy the colonel's note, Half-Breed Harry pointed to Buffalo Bill who was purposely near and said:

"Who is that senor, soldier?"

"The tall man is it yez was afther m'aning?"

"Yes."

"The man with the long brown hair?"

"Yes."

"And black eyes?"

"Yes."

"And dressed in buckskin?"

"Yes, there is but two there."

"I thought as how yez might m'ane the ither one."

"No, the senor with long hair."

"Why didn't yez say so, thin, Dago?"

"Who is he?"

"That man, Dago, is afther being the great and renowned Injun-slayer, guide, scout and wild rider, dead shot and lasso-thrower, Texas Jack of Texas, now sarving as a skoot in the United States Army, having been one time a rebel soldier, and a good one, under the bonnie blue flag, God bliss ould Ireland."

The cowboy had no words to reply, but simply rode away while orderly Maloney said:

"Bad luck to me for lying; but I mixed it up so I'm blamed if I know what I was talking about meself—oh, Mister Bill, I told him, sir."

"Told him what, orderly Maloney?"

"Tould the Dago, sir, that you was Texas Jack of Texas."

"He asked you then?"

"Yis, sur."

"I thought so," and Buffalo Bill walked away, just as Don Eduardo walked up toward headquarters.

Half an hour after the Don went to his cabin and mounting his horse rode away, on his errand for Colonel Loyal to Ranch Isle, for he had written Bessie Bond his acceptance for all of her kind invitations, and added that Don Eduardo Vincente would follow soon to carry a challenge of the lasso-throwers of the fort to herself, the Don and her two guests.

Following the Don out of the fort, the moment that he had gotten away from the stockade Buffalo Bill put his horse at a run, and by a flank movement gained the ridge before the Mexican had time to get there.

Hastily staking out his panting horse he ran along the ridge for half a mile and came to the cliff overlooking the spring and the monument to the massacred emigrants in the valley below.

He laid flat down upon the ground, and peering through a clump of bushes growing upon the edge of the cliff, looked over.

His position was a perfect one for observation, though of course he was out of ear-shot, for he was over a hundred yards away.

There in the Skeleton Gap he beheld Bessie Bond, seated upon the Rocky monument, her horse feeding near, while the Dago, Half Breed Harry, stood near, holding his mustang by the bridle-rein.

Bessie Bond was reading the colonel's letter.

When she had read it through she appeared to be questioning the man, after which she took a pencil from a case hung to her belt, and wrote something upon the back of the letter.

Then she handed it to the Dago, and with a salute he mounted his horse and rode away.

The maiden still remained in the Gap, pacing to and fro, striking her habit impatiently with her riding-whip.

"So the Dago is not afraid to go through Skeleton Gap, and Miss Bessie rather likes the spot."

"Now see if I am not right, and that she is waiting here for Don Eduardo, for Half-Breed Harry surely carried the Mexican a letter from her."

"Ah! it is as I thought, for there comes the Don down the Gap now."

As the scout spoke Don Eduardo Vincente rode into view, and as he did so the maiden waved her hand to him.

He returned it by raising his sombrero, and as he drew near, called out:

"Mount, Bessie, and we will go on to the ranch, for I go to see you from Colonel Loyal."

These words Buffalo Bill heard, and he saw her leap lightly into her saddle from the ground, wheel her mustang alongside of him, and the two go on at a canter down Skeleton Gap, in the direction of Ranch Isle.

"The third meeting," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he arose and started back for his horse, to return to the fort, for he seemed satisfied with his discovery.

CHAPTER L.

THE RECEPTION.

THE whole garrison was agog with excitement the next morning, when preparations were being made for the lasso tournament.

Buffalo Bill and several scouts had gone the evening before with his own, Surgeon Powell's Lieutenant Onderdonk's and Mustang Madge's horses to camp near Ranch Isle, so that the animals would be perfectly rested for the coming tournament on the morrow.

Bridles, saddles and lassoes had been carefully overhauled, and every arrangement made so that there should be no mistake that would lose the fort "team" the victory.

Don Eduardo had left his horse at Ranch Isle, and returned to the fort on one loaned him by Bessie Bond.

He reported that the two guests at Ranch Isle were old friends of the Bonds, and fast friends themselves, though one was a Mexican officer of Lancers, and the other a Texan Ranger.

Both men had won fame as lasso-throwers, and had hunted wild horses on the prairies for years.

The Don also reported that Bessie had gladly accepted the gauntlet thrown down to pit a fort team against herself and three others.

So all was satisfactory, and a committee of three gentlemen and two ladies of the fort was appointed to get up an appropriate design for the badges.

The committee consisted of Lord Lonsfield, Sir John Reeder, Captain Alfred Taylor, Mrs. Burton, the chaplain's wife, and Miss Caro Sidway.

Miss Sidway quickly sketched a design, which was at once accepted.

It was a coiled lariat of gold, with a Texan star swinging from it, the star to be of diamonds, as the amount subscribed would allow in its liberality of four such badges.

The colonel was cautious enough to order out a dozen scouts and a troop of cavalry as an escort, as there were so many ladies and children going along, for he wished to be prepared against any danger from a raiding band of Indians, or the outlaws known as The Deserters, who often came very near the fort in their depredations.

The ambulances went first with the elderly ladies and smaller children, and then came a mounted party on mustangs and ponies, of boys and girls ranging from ten to sixteen.

The troop followed them, and next came the older ones who cared to go on horseback, and there was quite a force of them.

The colonel, his staff and the contestants, with Lord Lonsfield and Sir John acting as honorary aides to the commandant, left the fort last, but soon galloped to the front and headed the procession, where the band, in a large wagon, was playing as they went along, for Colonel Loyal was determined to make the event a gold occasion.

The ride of ten miles was made rapidly, Buffalo Bill adding to the interest of the affair by guiding the pleasure-seekers through Skeleton Gap, thus cutting off considerable distance.

As they came in sight of the Ranch Isle, they descried the United States flag flying over the stockade gate, and over the house it floated again, in company with the Mexican colors, and the Lone Star flag of Texas.

Upon the broad piazza of the cabin were Mrs. Bond, Bessie, Don Eduardo, and the two guests.

One of these showed by his dark face and jetty hair that he came from the country beyond the Rio Grande.

He was a handsome young man, but with a haughty air, and was dressed in the costume of a Mexican officer of Lancers.

His companion was a tall, broad-shouldered, blonde-haired Texan, with blue eyes and a pleasant smile, and he was attired in a picturesque frontier dress.

The former was introduced as Captain Leon Luiz, and the Texan as Rancher Noel Norcross, better known as the "King of the Rope."

The Don was in the costume of a Mexican caballero, and Bessie Bond wore a snug-fitting black habit, upon the breast of which was embroidered the United States, Mexican and Lone Star flags, the two latter in honor of her guests and fellow-contestants in the lasso tourney.

Mrs. Bond and her daughter received their visitors with charming hospitality, introduced their two guests in the most graceful manner

possible, and led the way out under the trees where there was a most tempting luncheon set upon tables made for the occasion.

Indian rib-roasts, venison, wild turkeys, birds, potatoes roasted in the ashes, delicious bread and wine, with something stronger for the gentlemen, were there in abundance, and all feasted to their hearts' content, or rather their stomachs' content, and they could not but admit that the widow and her lovely daughter, if slow to return the hospitality of the fort, when they did so left nothing to complain of.

The children, troopers and scouts were also taken the best care of, and when at last the time came for the contest, all were in the best of humors.

The design for the badges had been submitted to the Border Belle and her lasso-throwers, and accepted as just the thing, and then came the bugle call to mount and ride to the scene of the contest.

"We know what Don Eduardo can do with the lariat, and he is good; but I am a little afraid of Captain Luiz, and especially of that Texan, Noel Norcross, who Bessie says is known as the King of the Rope.

"But we must not let them beat us, pards," said Mustang Madge, as the fort quartette rode together to the field.

"Yes, the Texan looks dangerous," Buffalo Bill remarked, and the surgeon and lieutenant thought so, too.

CHAPTER LI.

THE LASSO-THROWERS.

"How is the girl compared with you, senorita?" asked Captain Luiz of Bessie Bond as they rode toward the field.

"About equal, I should say: but let the contest prove," was the reply.

"And the handsome senior with the long, black hair looks dangerous."

"Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes."

"He is dangerous, the most dangerous man I know."

"And the officer in buckskin, who was introduced as the Surgeon Powell?"

"Another man to dread, Captain Luiz."

"There comes the officer in fatigue uniform?"

"Lieutenant Onderdonk."

"Yes, senorita."

"He throws a lasso about as I do."

"You throw well, senorita, excellently well! but with the surgeon and the scout to match Senior Norcross and myself, and the others pitted against the Don and yourself, we should beat them."

"We must do so, for there shall be no such word as fail on our part."

"You know what Norcross the Texan can do?"

"Oh, yes, there are no better throwers of the rope, he even almost equals me."

"Well, win we must and shall," was the decided response of Bessie Bond.

The situation chosen for the contest was a perfect one.

It was a meadow-land bordering the river, and fully a mile and a quarter long, by three-quarters in width.

Upon the land side was the ridge, leading to the ranch, and it rose from ten to twenty feet above the meadow level, giving a fine view of the entire field, and along this the soldiers, cowboys and scouts were stretched to keep the wild mustangs from breaking out.

Here and there in the ravine was a small stream, a ditch or bank, which would be obstacles in the way, yet only serve to show the superior horsemanship of the riders, in leaping them.

The meadow land was hard, so that high speed could be obtained, and the grass was short.

The spectators gathered about the center of the ridge, near the ranch, where the ground was highest, and the two Englishmen, Mrs. Lieutenant Colonel Barrington, Miss Caro Sidney and Chaplain Burton, were appointed as judges, with Colonel Loy as referee.

The rules of the match, as subscribed to by all, were that the lady lasso-throwers should first start out together, dash for the herd, which was corralled away over on the river, and being worked into a frenzy of fright by the Ranch Isle cowboys, and begin the work of lariatting the animals.

Their respective partners should follow them, to set a horse free when caught, as they could not be expected to do this, and in an hour's time was to be called and the count reported.

Then the throwers were to mount fresh horses, the other mustangs were to be set free, seventy in number, when the lady rope-throwers had had thirty to catch from.

In an hour's time the bugle would sound to "cease catching," and the count would be made.

The men horsemen were to throw and bind their horses as caught, making it more interesting, dangerous and exciting, and the two lady throwers were to keep on the field to lend their respective sides what aid they could.

Of course there was great excitement among the ladies and children looking on, fearing some deadly mishap, and a few were sorry they had come.

The men were excited, too, and side bets were going on continually, in favor of the fort party, though all admitted that the Texan and Mexican captains looked very dangerous.

At last the lasso-throwers rode up to position before the judges and saluted.

All could not but admire the superb seat in his saddle of the Texan, and many shook their heads dubiously as to the result.

He had a smile upon his face, not arrogant, yet confident.

Captain Luiz had a look of arrogance upon his handsome face, one of assured superiority, and he saluted with an off-hand manner hardly more than courteous.

He rode superbly, there was no doubt of that, and was splendidly mounted, making a very picturesque and brilliant show.

Don Eduardo Vincente always looked well, and rode well.

He bent low in his saddle before the judges, saluted the colonel, kissed his hand to the ladies, and wheeled his horse as though he was upon a pivot.

Bessie Bond, the Belle of the Border, never looked better in her life.

She sat in her saddle the picture of the perfect horsewoman, and held in her right hand her lariat, which she waved around her head as a salute to the judges and colonel, while she called to her mother:

"Good by, mamma, and pray for the Ranch Isle Four to win."

A cheer greeted this, and Bessie rode on by the side of Captain Luiz, Don Eduardo, and the Mexican following, as they circled around to salute their adversaries.

Mustang Madge rode her vicious looking mustang, was perfect in dress, equipments, and her seat in the saddle, and smiled sweetly upon all, not a trace of nervousness being upon her lovely young face.

Lieutenant Onderdonk rode by her side, and was in fatigue uniform, top-boots and slouch hat.

Surgeon Powell was dressed in buckskin, with his shoulder-straps on, top-boots and sombrero, and Buffalo Bill looked the very picture of the Border King, that he is.

When the bugle sounded they all rode to take position for the contest between the two rival Border Belles.

CHAPTER LII.

THE QUEENS OF THE LASSO.

No better lot of wild mustangs could have been found for the trial of skill than those on the Ranch Isle.

They had been caught wild on the prairies of the Northwest, and driven northward, where they had been allowed to run free on the ranch, simply kept from running away in a herd by the guard at the neck of land where the ford was.

With the few cowboys on the ranch, the heavy timber, hills and valleys, they were kept out of sight of human beings, and only corralled the night before, when they went to the brook for water, at a point where there was a corral they did not suspect the existence of.

There were some splendid-looking creatures among them, with long flowing mane and tail, clean limbs and arching necks.

They were of all hues and shades, black, white, bays, roans, claybanks with black manes and tails, and claybanks with silver manes and tails, spotted mustangs, sorrels, and dapple grays.

They were one hundred strong, and thirty had been cut off in a smaller corral to be let out first.

For one hour the cowboys of Ranch Isle

had been working the animals up to a frenzy, and when they at last got the signal of the bugle to let out the first herd, they threw down the high bars, yelled as only mustangers can yell, fired off their revolvers, and rushed them out like an avalanche.

The two parties of lasso-throwers awaited on the ridge, a few yards apart.

As they saw the smaller herd dash out from the timber upon the meadow, their faces flushed with well-controlled excitement.

Then the troopers and scouts, under orders, fired their carbines, cheered, and the band struck up a lively air.

The herd dashed over the plain in wild alarm, halted a moment, looked about them, and were off like the wind.

And, like the whirlwind, after them went the mustang-hunters.

In the race to overtake them, it was seen that Madge led her rival, their respective attendants each keeping behind their leaders.

The horse herd had turned at the high river bank, and, a moment later, Madge was in their midst.

Her lasso was whirling around her head, the spectators saw it cast into the air—saw her horse drop back upon his haunches, and the first mustang was caught and hurled to the ground.

In an instant her attendants had dismounted, and were over the animal, when Bessie Bond launched her lariat, and missed!

"Caramba!" shouted Captain Luiz, almost savagely.

But, gathering up her coil, with teeth hard set, Bessie Bond rode after a large black, threw and caught him!

In an instant her attendants freed her lasso from the fallen horse, and away she skimmed after another victim.

But, as she reached the herd, Madge turned them, threw her lariat, and a third horse was in the toils, while Bessie Bond had but one to her credit, for a second time she threw short.

"Come, Bessie, ride with me right after them," graciously cried Mustang Madge, and her rival obeyed, while the attendants of each kept close behind.

They soon caught up with the herd, and riding side by side, threw their lassoes together, Mustang Madge shouting:

"The silver-maned clay-bank is mine, Bessie."

"And the white is mine!" shouted Bessie.

Both were successful in their throws.

"Now for the herd again, Bessie," cried Madge, and away they flew, their horses in a foam and panting, the faces of each girl crimson with excitement.

Another throw was made, and again with success.

"You must separate!"

"She never misses! You are three behind her now."

"Caramba!"-shouted Captain Luiz.

Bessie obeyed this decided command, just as Madge threw again.

The animal was caught, but, darting off at an angle, as he sprung into the air at the twang of the lariat tightening, the mustang ridden by Madge was dragged down with a heavy fall.

A cry of terror arose from the spectators, but the agile girl landed on her feet, and when her horse struggled to his feet, she was again in the saddle, and off after another catch.

Separating from Madge at first seemed to give Bessie success, for she caught her horses right along, but as she missed two, and Madge made but one miss when the bugle sounded the signal for the hunters to cease catching.

"A good beginning, Bill, for the Daughter of the Fifth leads by four," said Surgeon Powell, in a low tone, as Lieutenant Onderdonk escorted Madge from the field, the still free mustangs rushing back toward the corral in terror.

"You have made a bad beginning for us, senorita," said Captain Luiz petulantly, and then added:

"But we will redeem your losses."

"Then Madge beat me?" asked Bessie, unheeding the Mexican's manner and words.

"Yes, by four."

"I did my best; see that you do as well," she responded.

"You did wonderfully well, Miss Bessie,

I had no idea that a woman could throw a lariat as you can," the Texan said pleasantly.

"Thank you but Madge Burton is better than I."

"She is a wonder with the rope too, and I hope her companions cannot do any better," was the reply as the party now rode up to the judge's stand to salute.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE KINGS OF THE LASSO.

THE mustang hunters were all greeted with wild cheers as they rode up to the judge's stand and saluted, and they courteously acknowledged the applause.

The face of Madge was devoid of triumph, she was too brave to crow over a defeated foe, and before all she extended her hand to her rival with the remark.

"The victory is not won yet, Bessie, by any means."

"The battle is only begun."

"May the best side win," laughed Bessie, but it was not her accustomed musical laughter.

Captain Luiz still looked arrogant, while the Texan rode up to Madge, doffed his sombrero and said:

"I offer my congratulations, Miss Madge."

"You have set a tremendous pace for the rest of us to follow."

She extended her hand in her frank way and replied:

"And you are just the man I am afraid of."

The Texan laughed, and the mustangers rode away for half an hour's rest and to change horses for the next struggle.

During the wait the spectators all discussed the wonderful exploits of both Madge and Bessie, and the ladies were particularly pleased in discussing what two of their sex could accomplish.

Madge came in for the most praise, for she had really shown more nerve and skill, and had not been in the least rattled by the fall of her horse.

When the time was up the bugle sounded, and mounted upon fresh horses the kings and queens of the rope at once rode up to the judge's stand.

Now the Texan led with Bessie Bond, and the two Mexicans followed, while Madge rode by the side of Buffalo Bill, and the two army officers came behind them.

As they neared the judges and referee, they deployed into line and saluted, then getting the order to go, saluting each other of the opposite side, they turned and rode to take up their respective positions.

All was breathless excitement now among the spectators, for the kings of the rope were to meet each other.

There was not a trace of nervousness on the part of her comrades.

Madge was glad to see all were as serene as a funeral, but she was too far off from their adversaries to mark just how they felt.

The signal was soon given to let the mustangs free, and as they dashed out of the timber upon the open plain, joined by the remnant of the herd the fair lasso-throwers had left, a wild cheer greeted them.

Guns were fired, pistols rattled, cheers and yells were heard, the band played, and Pandemonium seemed broke loose.

The bugle again rung out the charge, and the kings of the rope were off, the queen now following in the rear.

The Texan gave one loud, piercing yell, and went to the front of his party in an instant, whirling his lasso as he did so.

Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell, and Lieutenant Onderdonk broke out in a cheer, and rode abreast, their lariats ready.

But they kept even with the Texan.

Seeing this he touched his Mexican rowels to the flanks of his horse and shot ahead.

But only for an instant, for American spurs were just as good, and the trio of the fort were even with him in an instant.

The two Mexicans crept side by side as close behind the Texan as they could, and Bessie was just in their rear.

Madge followed her leaders, and was even with the Mexicans.

In this catch the two maidens were not to throw a lasso, only keep on the field to be with their leaders.

The first throw was from the Texan's hand, and he caught his horse, sprung from his

saddle, in an instant had hopped him, and was off after another.

Buffalo Bill threw a second later, and was after a second prize as the Texan was.

Surgeon Powell and Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk threw together and with success.

So the battle went on, until there was a miss.

It was Don Eduardo, and Captain Luiz swore so loud it was heard by the spectators; but fortunately for ears polite he swore in Spanish.

Perhaps it was his anger at his countryman's miss of a horse that made him follow suit.

And then he did not swear, at least aloud.

And perhaps seeing them miss caused Lieutenant Onderdonk to throw short, and his horse got away, but was caught an instant after by Buffalo Bill.

The scene was now wildly exciting, for misses were made, and yet the spectators could hardly keep the count, so knew not which side was ahead.

The count of hopped horses on the field would have to show, for each mustanger had their own hoppers so that there could be no mistake.

That the Texan did not miss all agreed, and the same was said of Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, when suddenly the horse or the latter went down and he missed his mustang.

The doctor rose quickly, leaped into his saddle and was again in full chase.

Brooks and ditches were now and then cleared in magnificent style, and in skurrying over the field Mustang Madge never missed her opportunity to take one.

"We are ahead," cried Bessie Bond, as she flew by Madge going across the field.

"The battle is not yet over, Bessie," the answer floated back, and then came the bugle notes sounding the call.

"Cease firing," which was made to answer the purpose of:

"Cease catching."

Instantly the mustangers wheeled their tired horses and rode toward the judges' stand, while the terrified herd went flying away to a distant part of the field.

Then down upon the field rode the referee and judges, and the count of the hopped horses was begun, for that would tell the story of who the victors were.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE VICTORS.

THE excitement of the spectators subsided, as the victors and vanquished, as they might be, rode up and took position in front of the judges:

The latter had gone over the field and made their count of the hopped horses, and the cowboys had followed with the hoppers.

These were placed in front of the judges in eight different piles.

There were the hoppers with the blue ribbon which belonged to Madge, those with the red ribbon belonging to Bessie Bond, the tiny Mexican flag attached to those of Captain Luiz, red and black colors for Don Eduardo, and blue with a gold star for the Texan.

The yellow of Surgeon Powell, red, white and blue of Lieutenant Onderdonk, and the tiny American flag of Buffalo Bill completed the list.

Lord Lonsfield ran over the count to see if they tallied with the count of horses upon the field, and then the judges had a talk with the referee, and Colonel Loyal was ready to speak.

"The magnificent display of nerve and skill which we have just witnessed, has resulted in a hard-won victory."

"It has been a victory that has tried horses and riders to the utmost, has demanded a pluck that is heroic, and a steady and strong arm and quick eye."

"It has been a battle we have never seen ladies fight in before, and the two who have so nobly upheld their own in the brilliant contest are deserving of the highest praise."

"I will now call off the names of the contestants, and Lord Lonsfield will keep tally with the number of wild horses each one lassoed."

"Are you ready, my lord?"

"Ready, sir."

"Miss Bessie Bond."

"Five!" announced Lord Lonsfield.

"Captain Leon Luiz, of Mexico."

"Eight!"

"Don Eduardo Vincente, of Mexico."

"Seven!"

"Mr. Noel Norcross, the King of the Rope, of Texas."

"Thirteen!"

The voice of Lord Lonsfield was louder in calling out the last number, and a perfect storm of applause greeted the words.

It was evident that the quiet-looking and courteous Texan was a favorite with all.

Captain Leon Luiz bit his lips viciously as he found himself distanced so badly.

Then Lord Lonsfield handed the list to Colonel Loyal, with the number captured upon it also.

The total number captured by the Ranch Isle quartette is thirty-three, with not a single miss for the Texan King of the Rope.

Applause followed, and the crowd anxiously awaited the second list.

So far the spectators, other than the judges, did not know the result.

All was suspense yet to see which quartette had been the victors.

"Are you ready, my Lord Lonsfield?"

"All ready, sir."

Then the colonel began to call out as before:

"Miss Madge Burton, The Daughter of the Fifth."

"Seven!"

"Surgeon Frank Powell."

"Eight!"

"Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk."

"Seven!"

"William F. Cody, Buffalo Bill."

"Thirteen!"

A cheer greeted Buffalo Bill's number, and then the total was handed up by Lord Lonsfield to Colonel Loyal, who said:

"The total number captured by the Fort Quartette is *thirty-five!*"

Before more could be said the Texan took off his sombrero and cried:

"Three cheers for the victors!"

It was a handsome recognition of the victors, and the cheer was given with a will, though Captain Leon Luiz did not open his lips, as some noticed.

Continuing, Colonel Loyal said:

"It is due to the Daughter of the Fifth and to Surgeon Powell to state that the horses of each of them had a fall, which lost for the Surgeon Scout several prizes."

"The gallant Texan, Mr. Norcross, justly claims the title he has won of King of the Rope, and we are glad to feel that our famous chief of scouts, Buffalo Bill, our king of scouts, was so fortunate to tie the gentleman from Texas."

"Now let me say that I have the pleasure of proclaiming the Mustang-Hunters of Fort Beauvoir the victors in this hard-fought tournament of lasso-throwers, and their badges will be presented to them as soon as it is possible for them to be made in the East, for a most liberal purse has been raised for that purpose."

"Now let us give three cheers and a tiger for the vanquished!"

The cheers and the "tiger" were given with a will, and the wild-horse hunt was at an end, and all pressed forward to thank Mrs. Bond and Bessie for a most delightful day at their lovely home.

"We must get a herd of wild horses at the fort, Miss Bessie, and keep this sport up, for it is novel and entertaining in the extreme," said the colonel.

If Bessie Bond felt any chagrin at her defeat, not a shadow on her face showed it; but that the Mexican captain felt it was certain, and the Don did not appear in his usual happy mood.

"You must bring your guests to the fort, Miss Bessie, for we will all be delighted to see both you and Mr. Norcross, Captain Luiz."

"We can get up an entertainment for your benefit."

"You will come soon," said the colonel.

The Mexican bowed, while the Texan thanked the colonel and promised an early call.

Then the bugle sounded and the start back to the fort was begun, the Don going back with the officers, and leaving his countrymen and the Texan at Ranch Isle.

CHAPTER LV.

UNDER SUSPICION.

THE shadows were beginning to lengthen, when the cavalcade started upon its return to the fort, and as it would be nightfall before reaching Skeleton Gap, a number of the ladies requested the colonel to send a courier ahead to Buffalo Bill telling him not to go through "that horrid haunted canyon."

The colonel obeyed the command of the fair sex, and so the scout went around by the broad trail.

As they neared the fort, a scout having ridden ahead and reported the victory of Mustang Madge and her party, they were received with cheer after cheer, the lighting of camp-fires and every demonstration of delight.

Madge was cheered again and again to the echo, and the others came in for a round of congratulations.

Those who had witnessed the wild horse chase soon dispersed to their respective homes, tired out with the day of sport, and, after going to his own cabin, Buffalo Bill sought the house of Colonel Loyal.

The colonel at once received him in his room, where in dressing-gown and slippers he was enjoying a cigar after supper.

"Well, Cody, I must congratulate you upon your superb work to-day."

"You matched the Texan, who is a remarkable lasso-thrower."

"We were proud of you, and sorry that Powell had a set-back in the falling of his horse."

"Where is he to-night?"

"Over at the chaplain's, sir, to see Miss Madge, for did you know she broke the little finger of her left hand to-day?"

"Not when and how?"

"When her horse was dragged down, sir, the lariat caught her hand against the saddle-horn and broke it."

"That girl has more pluck than any of her sex I ever saw; why she caught several horses after that."

"I know she did, sir, and never said a word of her hurt to mar the pleasure of the day."

"But when she reached the fort she sent for Surgeon Powell and told him that she would like to have the bone of her finger set."

"It was much swollen, but the doctor set it perfectly, and said that Miss Madge laughed and talked with him while he was about it."

"She is a marvel to me, Cody."

"And to any one else, sir."

"She is, indeed, and her riding was simply grand."

"She is superior to the Border Belle, I think."

"Yes, sir, in everything; but did you see how it hurt Miss Bond to lose?"

"I thought she took it very sweetly."

"In manner, yes, sir, but she was mad clean through, for I saw it in her eyes."

"Well, she hoped to win; I do think the Mexican captain was hurt."

"Yes, sir, he was mad enough to fight over it."

"And the Texan did not care."

"No, sir, he laughed over it; but he did his share, and more."

"And the Don seemed a little surprised."

"Yes, sir; but colonel, I have come for a little talk with you, sir, about the Don."

"Well?"

"And one other, sir."

"Who is the other?"

"Miss Bond."

"Ah!"

"You know, sir, that my scouting life makes me suspicious, and though I can make no accusation against either the Don or Miss Bessie, sir, I know that they have both expressed dread of Skeleton Gap."

"As many others have."

"True, sir, and kept away, which they have not."

"You know of their going then?"

"I know, sir, that the day after the shooting match Miss Bessie started home alone."

"Yes."

"The Don went to his, quarters made a flank movement and followed her."

"I saw his trail, reconnoitered, and beheld the Don and Miss Bond on ahead talking together."

"A love affair, eh?"

"I thought so at first, sir; but I went

back on my trail, met the Don, and he told me he had not seen Miss Bond, but was anxious about her, and so had come out as a protection."

"A lover's lie."

"It was a very matter-of-fact lie, sir."

"I went on, and to try her went to her ranch and told her I was anxious about her, and had come to see if she had gotten home safe, as I had followed a suspicious trail."

"And her answer?"

"She, too, said she had not seen the Don."

"A story from lips so fair?"

"Yes, sir."

"I went on to Overland City, and on the way back came through Skeleton Gap."

"You do not fear the weird place, it seems."

"No, sir."

"And then?"

"I saw trails running there, one of them very fresh, and there at the monument found the Don and Miss Bessie."

"Ah! this grows interesting."

"I surprised them, sir, and could see that they were as mad as hornets."

"But she found her tongue and told me the Don had made a bet with her that she would not go there and leave her glove so he could find it."

"He chipped in then and helped her out, and I came on to the fort with the Don, while she went back home."

"I do not understand their meeting there."

"Trails, sir, show that they have done so many times."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir, and yesterday the courier that brought you a note from Miss Bessie, also took one to the Don."

"He did?"

"Yes, sir, and the man was a half-breed, whom three of the Ranch Isle cowboys, who dogged me for some reason, said had robbed them and gone."

"But they lied to me, too."

"I followed the Don out, cut down the valley and reached the cliffs overlooking Skeleton Gap."

"The half-breed had arrived, and there was Miss Bessie, and soon after the Don came, and they rode off together."

"And what do you make of all this, Cody?"

"Yesterday, sir, I heard Captain Luiz give orders, which Miss Bessie obeyed, and though I do not yet understand it all, I ask you, sir, to please watch them while I am off on this Blind Trail after the lost heir."

"I will, Cody, and I am glad you have put me on my guard, for they are playing a game of some kind, that is certain," responded the colonel.

CHAPTER LVI.

A SHOT FROM BEHIND.

THE scout, upon leaving the colonel's quarters, stopped to see Surgeon Powell, and found him at home, he having just returned from Captain Burton's.

"How is Miss Madge?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Bright as a lark."

"And her finger?"

"Set, and will be all right in a few weeks."

"She's a plucky girl, Bill."

"I should say so; but now, Doc, I wished to ask you if it is decided to start to-morrow on our Blind Trail?"

"Yes, to-morrow night."

"Well, that will give us all day to-morrow to prepare."

"And make the best of preparations, for we wish to camp in comfort and live on the best."

"We will, too, for I shall get the best the sutler has of everything needed, and have ordered half a dozen pack-mules, with all that was put down on the list, and these Englishmen do not do things by halves."

"Indeed they do not."

"I only wish they lived at the fort."

"So do I."

"But the colonel wants us to get away at night, I believe."

"Yes; he says that it is to be given out that we are going out on a hunt, and no one will be made any the wiser."

"That is the best way."

After some further conversation upon the

subject of their going upon the Blind Trail, Buffalo Bill asked:

"What did you think of that Mexican captain, White Beaver?"

"I thought him ill-humored, discourteous and arrogant."

"Just my opinion of him; but did you hear how he spoke to Miss Bessie?"

"Yes, as though he had a claim upon her."

"He swore like the army in Flanders, when she missed catching a horse and was as meek as a lamb when he made a failure; but the Texan has grit in him."

"Oh yes, I liked him; but do you think Miss Bessie can be engaged to Captain Luiz?"

"I do not know."

"Or to Don Eduardo?"

"Ah! I have thought there was something going on there."

"Or the Texan?"

"Nonsense!"

"It is not so much nonsense as you think."

"She's a sad flirt, I know, but not so bad I think as to be engaged to three men at the same time."

"I do not say that she is engaged to them."

"What then?"

"I simply believe that Captain Luiz has some claim upon her, that Don Eduardo is her lover, and that the Texan is—"

"What?"

"I heard her twice to-day call him brother."

"Do you mean it, Bill?"

"I certainly do."

"You astonish me."

"Recall their faces and see if they do not resemble each other."

"They certainly do, now I remember their faces."

"Granted that the Texan is her brother, I cannot just place her with Captain Leon Luiz and Don Eduardo Vincente."

"Nor I."

"Well, I am sorry for this reason that you and I are going off on this Blind Trail, for somehow I do not understand the little game that they are playing, and I am most anxious to do so."

"As I am; but what can it amount to?"

"Only to solve the mystery about those people."

"True."

"The Don is a mystery, Mrs. Bond, Bessie and the cowboys there are mysteries, and now here comes along a Mexican and Texan who only complicate the Chinese puzzle now on our hands."

"Well, I guess the solving of it will keep."

"I hope so, and it must, for we both go to-morrow to be gone no one knows how long."

"What hope have you of trailing this lost heir mystery?"

"Every hope now."

"As I have."

"With this the two friends parted, and to pass away the evening Buffalo Bill went over to the Devil's Acre."

Emerald Ed was there, as usual, and about the time he entered, Keno Kate came in and began to play.

The saloon was well crowded, and betting was running along in a lively manner, when suddenly into the room came Half-Breed Harry and the two guests of Ranch Isle.

The Texan strolled in with his natural free and easy way, and the Mexican in his arrogant manner.

Buffalo Bill had certainly not expected to see them there, and he almost expected to behold Bessie Bond with them, but was disappointed in this.

Just as the three, for Half-Breed Harry was leading, passed Buffalo Bill, but without seeing him, a tall fellow arose in his tracks, and leveling a revolver at the Mexican, cried savagely:

"I know you, Monte Del Sol, and as you killed my brother, so you are now my game!"

The Mexican turned quickly, as also did the Texan and Half-Breed, but the speaker's revolver was covering the form of Captain Luiz, his finger upon the trigger, and just as he fired his arm was struck upward by Buffalo Bill.

"Fool! these gentlemen are guests of Colonel Loyal," cried Buffalo Bill, as the bullet went flying upward over the Mexican's head.

"It's the man I say he is, Bill, for I know him well, and I'll kill him, for he's a—"

A quick flash and report came from the Mexican's revolver, and the man fell back dead in the arms of the scout.

"There was no need to have killed him, Captain Luiz, for I had my grip upon him, and he could not have fired," reproachfully said the scout.

"Ah! I did not know that, but supposed he was about to fire, so I shot him.

"I owe you my life, Senor Cody, and I thank you, for, but for you that man would have killed me."

"Yes, he would have killed you," repeated Buffalo Bill, and then as he laid the dead form back, he mused:

"Yes, and by killing the poor fellow Leo Luiz kept him from telling what he knew, for that man surely had met the Mexican before, and his lips, now sealed forever, could have told me, perhaps, all that I would know."

Soon after the Mexican and Texan left the saloon, Buffalo Bill returned to the fort.

CHAPTER LVII.

A SECRET PARD.

It was late at night when the two Englishmen bade farewell to Colonel Loyal, expressing their appreciation of his many kindnesses, and true hospitality over and over again, and started for their quarters to mount and away upon the trail of their missing kinsman, Granger Goldhurst.

They had been told to leave their quarters as they were, to carry nothing with them excepting camp-traps, and return to the fort to stay at their pleasure when some discovery had been made to their satisfaction about Settler Goldhurst being alive or dead.

This they had done, and going to their quarters they found awaiting them there Captain Taylor, Lieutenant Onderdonk and Surgeon Powell.

"The men are ready to mount, gentlemen, the animals all packed and we are awaiting Buffalo Bill," said Captain Taylor.

"Is it not strange for him to behind be and?" asked Lord Lonsfield.

"It is, but I received a line from him telling me he had an important matter to attend to, and begging our consideration for a while."

"Certainly, we can easily await his pleasure, and in the mean while have a glass together," said Lord Lonsfield, and they sat down to the table together.

The scout, however, was detained longer than he had expected to be.

As he was preparing to start he suddenly had flashed into his mind an idea which caused him to sit down, write a note and dispatch a scout with it.

"The note read:

"SCOUTS' RANCH
Thursday.

"MY DEAR MISS MADGE:—

"It is late I know, and perhaps I have no right to disturb you, but may I come and see you for ten minutes upon an important matter?"

"Faithfully,
CODY."

An answer was soon returned.

"MY DEAR BUFFALO:—

"I had retired for the night, but am up and awaiting your visit.

"I was aware that some one was going to sneak out of the fort to night and not say good-by to me.

"Come

"Yours,
"MUSTANG."

This arranged, Buffalo Bill went to the chaplain's pleasant quarters.

Madge opened the door for him and ushered him into the chaplain's "sermon mill," as she called his working-room.

"Oh! but I have a scolding for Lord Lonsfield, Sir John, Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk on their return, for I see and hear if I do not appear to, and I know that a lot of my military fathers, rank and file, are going off on a racket of some kind to-night.

"I'll forgive you, Buffalo Bill, because you called."

"I have but a moment to tell you, too, why I called, Miss Madge, for I am detaining the party now, for as you seem to know we are going I will not hide it from you.

"We are going upon a hunt, for the pleasure of the two English gentlemen."

Madge slowly closed one eye and asked:

"Why all this mystery and midnight departure for merely a hunt?"

"You may know both, but now to my visit to you, for it is of importance."

"You are not going to make love to me as you shoot, off-hand, are you, Buffalo?"

"No, I have better sense, for I would miss my aim, yes, the target."

"Practice makes perfect," sighed the little coquette.

"Yes, but as scout of the Fifth, I am not making love to my daughter."

"Well said, father."

"Now to business."

"I am going away for an indefinite time, and wish to intrust you with a secret."

"I am a woman, you forget."

"Yes, and one who can keep a secret."

"Thanks"

"I wish to tell you that I have no confidence in Don Eduardo Vincente."

"Oh!"

"Nor in Miss Bessie Bond."

"Don't slander a woman, Cody."

"You understand just what I mean, for you do not like her, or trust her either."

"Ah!"

"It is true, for I have watched you closely."

"As I am found out I'll own up."

"I cannot tell you now, Miss Madge, all the reasons I have for suspecting them, or what I suspect them of; but I am sure that they knew each other before they came here, and I am almost certain that the Texan Noel Norcross, is the brother of Bessie Bond."

"Bill, I heard her call him brother yesterday."

"As I did, and with these points in our knowledge, as also that she meets Don Eduardo regularly in Skeleton Gap, it shows that they are leading a life of mystery."

"It does."

"If so, it is for some purpose."

"If for a purpose, it cannot be a good one, or it would not be hidden."

"I have certain beliefs and suspicions, which now I have not the time to make known to you; but I am not acting wholly blindly in this affair, and I ask you to go on as before, but to be my scout upon them, and jot down all you see and hear."

"Can I depend upon you, Miss Madge?"

"Every time, Buffalo Bill, and I'll start on the trail to-morrow, there's my hand upon it."

"Well, good-by, my secret pard, and when I return I am sure your woman's wit and tact will have made discoveries beyond my power to do so."

A moment after the scout was gone, and looking after him, Madge said aloud:

"So he suspects too, as I have done?"

CHAPTER LVIII.

OFF ON THE BLIND TRAIL.

WHEN Buffalo Bill arrived at the English men's quarters he found them awaiting him. If impatient at the delay, no one showed it, and Lord Lonsfield said cheerily:

"Come, Cody, join us in a glass upon our success."

"Thank you, Lord Lonsfield, and let me ask pardon of you all for my delay, for I was unavoidably detained."

"Do not speak of it, for there is no hurry, so we get out of the fort between midnight and dawn."

"The hour was set for midnight, sir, and it is now nearly one; but I was afraid to go away and leave some scouting work undone, which I had begun upon, and I had to find some one to put upon it."

"I hope you did so."

"Yes, sir, one of the best of scouts."

"Then let us drink to Light upon the Blind Trail."

The glasses clinked, the bumpers were drank with a relish, and five minutes after the party were in the saddle.

The scout rode to the front, his cloak drawn about him, for it was chilly, and Captain Taylor and Lord Lonsfield followed, Surgeon Powell and Sir John Reed next, and Lieutenant Onderdonk with a corporal and twelve soldiers in the rear.

Next came the negro servants and the pack-animals, and the sergeant and twelve more troopers came behind, with Texas Jack as far back as Buffalo Bill was in the lead, bringing up the rear.

The scout led the force at a trot, for he wished to get well away from the vicinity of the fort by sunrise, so as not to be seen by

any of the garrison or settlement that might be going about the neighborhood.

A six mile an hour pace was kept up for three hours, and then a halt was called for a camp.

Two hours' sleep, and then breakfast refreshed all, and they moved off once more by seven o'clock, and marching slow, held on until noon, when a camp was called for several hours.

Four hours' travel in the afternoon followed, and then an all-right rest.

Buffalo Bill did not know just what was before them, and he wished to spare the men and animals all he could, so that if called on for hard work they would be ready and able for it.

The next morning at dawn found them some twenty miles from the Massacre Valley.

They had dropped civilization, such as it was, far behind them.

Of the settlements that had been established on that advanced line, one had been utterly wiped out by the Indians, and the other, warned by the fate of their fellow-settlers, had given up their homes and fallen back within the line of the forts to establish others.

Beyond them, west of Massacre Valley, was the Indian country, a land where only a large force of soldiers would dare to penetrate, and then only with a strong support near to retreat upon.

There were strong villages of red-skins there, situated up in the mountains and defying attack.

There were warriors by the thousand, if called to war by the tocsin of their head chief, and though then quiet perhaps, it was but the lion asleep, and a mouse might arouse him.

Of course the Indians were hostile ever, and when they could strike a blow they would do so.

But just at that time all scouts reported that they were keeping very close to their villages, that few raiding bands were out, and those were small ones.

But Colonel Loyal had wished his guests thoroughly protected.

He knew that a larger force could not move readily and not be seen, and a smaller one than that sent would be most dangerous to start upon an expedition that might keep them for weeks upon the confines of the Indian country.

So he had held a talk with Captain Taylor, noted as the best Indian-fighter in the garrison, and the result was that Lieutenant Onderdonk was selected as his second, and he had won a name, young as he was, in red-skin warfare.

Then the old Indian-fighters among the troops, independent of those in the captain's own company, had been picked for the expedition, with a sergeant and corporal who had served long on the frontier.

Even the two negro recruits had seen arrows fly, and knew what might be before them.

The horses and pack-animals, the stores, the weapons and ammunition were all most carefully selected, while it was well known that Lord Lonsfield and Sir John were a host in themselves.

To this small, but splendid command, was attached Surgeon Frank Powell, a man who was a superb scout, a terror in battle, and knew the country thoroughly.

Buffalo Bill as chief guide and scout, and Texas Jack, with little less fame, completed the band of picked men to go upon this Blind Trail after a man who had given up title and wealth to make a home upon the wilds of the frontier, and who was supposed to have been slain by Indians long years before, yet might still be alive, a prisoner to red-skins, living a cruel, wretched existence among savages who had butchered all who were dear to him.

After a lapse of so many years since Granger Goldhurst had last been seen or heard of, it was no wonder that both Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Frank Powell pronounced it a "Blind Trail" they were going to follow.

CHAPTER LIX.

SUSPICIOUS SIGNS.

THE two scouts were up bright and early the next morning, and off in a circuit while yet the camp was asleep.

Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack had both slept with one eye open, for they knew they were in a very dangerous neighborhood.

Upon the visit of Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell before to the Massacre Valley, it was just where the camp was then that they had noted Indian trails, of small hands.

"We'll make a ring around the camp, Jack, and see if there are any reds about, or fresh trails," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and meet beyond," answered Texas Jack.

It was just light enough to see, and so they started.

In an hour's time, when the sun was up, they met a mile away from the camp just opposite the spot they had started from.

"How is it, Jack?"

"Our camp is known."

"You saw signs?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Two."

"Where?"

"There they are."

They went to a trail near by, and Buffalo Bill saw that it was made by two horses.

"Unshod?"

"Yes, Bill."

"Injuns, sure."

"Certain."

"Made after the dew fell."

"Yes."

"And heading toward our camp."

"I have been on it."

"Well?"

"It turns just in sight of the camp and branches off to the westward."

"Just the two trails I saw there."

"You saw them?"

"Yes, and they were coming from our camp, and then go toward it."

"They are the same."

The two scouts followed on the trail for half a mile.

They came to a rise from which the camp was visible a third of a mile away.

"They hitched their ponies here?"

"Yes, there are the signs."

"And went on foot."

"But it was too open for them to get very near, and as our horses are in three corrals, they doubtless counted the nearest one and think we number eight or ten men."

"Good!"

"And their trail went from here to the westward."

"Yes, and was the one I crossed."

"They have a band near."

"Doubtless a hunting-party."

"Yes."

"Well, we know what to expect, so every man must keep his eyes open."

With this the two scouts went on to the camp where they found the fires blazing cheerily and breakfast being cooked by Chips and his comrade Bird; who was so dark in hue, the soldiers had nicknamed him Crow, a name that he was known by far better than the one he claimed as given him in infant baptism, George Washington Bird.

The fragrant coffee, broiling steaks and bacon and hot hoe-cake sent forth an odor that was very appetizing, and the party were soon eating with a relish which fresh air, exercise and good health always bring to men and women alike.

"Well, Bill, you got onto a trail, I guess," said Dr. Powell, for he seemed to feel that the scouts had made some discovery.

"It was what I did, doctor."

"Well?"

"Two red-skins reconnoitered our camp, and went off to report."

"They doubtless belong to a hunting-party not far away, and as we divided our horses, they suspect us of being smaller in force than we are, and will find themselves mistaken."

"And we will go on, Cody?"

"Oh, yes, Lord Lonsfield, we will go on to the Massacre Valley, and if we can catch a red-skin, perhaps Doc, Jack and I can scare him into telling us who those are in their villages held as prisoners."

"A good idea; but I thought an Indian would never betray a secret of his people."

"It is generally so, Lord Lonsfield."

"Yes, I believe some of the officers have told me an Indian would die before he would

confess anything," remarked Sir John Reeder.

"It is true; he would die before he would. But there are some things a red-skin values more than life, and I believe we can force from one what we would know."

"We will at least set our trap to catch one and try."

"To explain," said Surgeon Powell.

"If an Indian is threatened with being scalped, being thus made a squaw brave, he will tell what the fear of death would never force him to do."

"Ah! that is it?"

"Yes."

"Then catch a red-skin," laughed Lord Lonsfield.

"Yes, by all means," added Sir John.

The troopers were now in the saddle, and with Buffalo Bill far ahead, and Texas Jack flanking, the march began.

They had not progressed very far when they saw Buffalo Bill awaiting their coming.

"Doc, there are ugly signs about, and of a large force."

"Yes, we passed over a trail of a hundred or more in a bunch."

"Those are not all, so will you drop to the rear, while Jack can keep first on one flank and then the other?"

"With pleasure, Bill."

The Surgeon Scout at once dropped to the rear, as the command moved on, while Texas Jack was signaled to scout first one flank and then the other, as the nature of the ground permitted and revealed traps for an ambush.

CHAPTER LX.

PRECAUTION.

THE troopers had moved on until nearly noon, fresh trails of small and large bands of Indians being seen as they went along.

The idea of turning back and seeking safety in flight never once entered the mind of the chief of scouts.

He was out for work and not for an instant did he expect to be scared off by a hundred or two hundred red-skins.

"If we cannot go on with this force, then it will take a thousand men to do so, for we are not hampered in any way," Lieutenant Onderdonk had said to the two Englishmen.

They had both observed the bearing of the men, and naturally compared it with that of the English soldiers in danger of a like kind.

They saw in the Americans a free and easy manner, an utter indifference to peril, and a perfect reliance upon the scouts and officers.

If the latter said go on they were content, and as long as Buffalo Bill, out half a mile ahead alone did not hesitate in his onward march there was nothing for them to complain about.

The restrictions of a silent march were removed from the men, and they laughed and chatted as they rode along, joking about the danger, the Indians and telling of big scares comrades had had.

Lieutenant Onderdonk was as cool as an icicle, and laughed at a story told by a trooper and which he had overheard.

The two negroes, Chips and Crow, were full of courage too, though they kept their eyes, as Chips said:

"Scouting among de trees for a Injun with a arrer."

"These are a remarkable people, John," said Lord Lonsfield, as Lieutenant Onderdonk rode on ahead some distance.

"Very; they amaze me more and more, and command my admiration."

"No wonder they whipped us in the war of the Revolution, Lucien."

"I was thinking of that, and in the war of 1812, John."

"Yes, and it must be their free Government, their independence of spirit that makes them so."

"Yes, and the mixture of races, where their descendants seem to imbibe all the best qualities of their forefathers, and drop the worst."

"Why they are great soldiers, statesmen, sailors, inventors, authors and artists, while they have a fund of humor that is remarkable."

"Take Cody, for instance, his humor is refreshing, dry, yet sparkling, and his companions are the funniest I ever heard."

"Well, lieutenant?" and Otey Onderdonk just rode back and joined them.

"I saw Cody, and he says we are to march in close column, pack-animals in the center, and a couple of troopers as flankers at each side, for Texas Jack goes ahead with him, and they are to scout half a mile apart."

"Now, Lieutenant Onderdonk, I hope you know Sir John and myself well enough to know that as for ourselves we fear nothing; but have we a right, for our own personal benefit, to draw into deadly peril you and your gallant men, for Captain Taylor has been doing scouting duty on the left, leaving the right to Texas Jack, and I know the danger must be great?"

"I sent a man to ask Captain Taylor to come in, sir, so as to send out flankers; but it is as dangerous to go back now as to advance, while there is a valley above here, which, Cody says, we can retreat through and return to the fort if the red-skins get too numerous for us."

"Yet we have not seen an Indian."

"And will not until they strike us, sir."

"Well, we say go back, or on, as you deem the best and wisest, only remember we do not wish to lead others to their death on our account."

Just then Captain Taylor came in from the left flank.

His face wore no expression of anxiety, and he said pleasantly

"We have all the company we can accommodate, should the ball begin, Onderdonk."

"Yes, sir, so Cody says, for as you ordered, I rode forward and overtook him."

"And what says Buffalo Bill?"

"To throw a couple of soldiers out on each flank, sir, send Texas Jack to the front to aid him, and march in close column with arms ready for a sudden attack."

"I'll do it, for Buffalo Bill knows."

Then turning to the command, Captain Taylor picked out four men and sent two out on either side as flankers.

"Keep your eyes open, men, and don't run upon an Indian in ambush."

"Keep in sight of the command, and signal if you see a red-skin."

"If you have to retreat kill a red-skin and then fall back upon us."

The soldiers saluted and rode away, while the captain called out:

"Order Texas Jack to the front to report to Buffalo Bill, Kennedy."

"Yes, sir."

"We have seen nothing of Surgeon Powell for some time," said Lord Lonsfield with some anxiety in tone.

"I will drop a man back to see where he is."

"No, captain, you are here, so let me go."

"All right, Onderdonk, and if he needs you, stay, and I will drop back two men to keep just in sight of the command."

"If the Indians get in on us then, they are more cunning than Cody and the whole of this outfit," said Captain Taylor, while Lieutenant Onderdonk, with two men, fell back to the rear.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE PURSUIT.

LIEUTENANT ONDERDONK left his two men to follow the command and keep just in sight, while he went further back after the Surgeon Scout.

He found White Beaver further back than he had anticipated doing, with his repeating rifle across his saddle and ready as he said at any moment,

"For a fight or a foot-race."

"I tell you, Doc, you are in a dangerous place here," said the lieutenant.

"It strikes me we are not any of us as safe as we would be in the fort. Otey; but I am just scouting now to see where the reds intend to make an attack."

"You think they intend to do it while on the march?"

"Oh, yes."

"And not wait for us to encamp to-night?"

"No, for if they did they would not warn us with a surround, as they are doing."

"I see."

"They would follow, but not show up, for then they would not have us so thoroughly on our guard as now."

"I guess you are right."

Now, my idea is to push on as we are, and when we near the Gap going into the Massacre Valley, to make a sudden dash.

"There is an open country for a couple of miles before we reach the Gap, and their intention is, I believe, to get us into the Gap, where they have the hills and heavy timber upon us, so suppose you suggest to Buffalo Bill what I say, though he may strike the same idea, and if so, then signal back, and we will go with a rush for the Gap.

"Once we head them off, then they are in our rear, and cannot readily flank us, while we have the lower end of the valley to retreat through, if it comes to that, which I hope it will not, and it will then be a race back to the fort, with no reds between."

"I will go at once and see Cody, and tell him what you say.

"How far is the Gap ahead now?"

"Some five miles, I believe."

"Well, Cody sent word for Jack to come ahead with him, and that two flankers should be put out, and march that way."

"He is wise."

"The command is also marching in close column now."

"Better still."

"And you will come up within sight of a man I have placed just within view of the command."

"Yes, and a signal will call me on."

The lieutenant now rode forward after the command, and coming up with the soldier in the rear, said:

"O'Hara, keep one eye over your shoulder, so as to hold Surgeon Powell in sight, and your other eye to watch for a signal from the command, which, when you get, come on with a run as soon as you have signaled Surgeon Powell.

"Yes sir."

"Remember, one eye behind you, the other in your front."

"Faith, and it's meself can do that same, lieutenant, being as I'm cross-eyed."

"Yes; I had not thought of that, O'Hara, you are the very man for the work, and I am glad you mentioned it, for I will suggest to the colonel to get a company of soldiers for scouting work with eyes on the bias."

"Yis, sur; and I'd like to be chafe of that same company, being as I suggested the idea, sur."

"I shall nominate you at the first military convention we hold, as chief of the Cross-Eyed Rangers, O'Hara."

"Thank you, sur; it's the O'Haras that were afther being chafes in the ould country, and we may yet be in Ameriky."

"No doubt of it," said the lieutenant as he rode on, and when out of ear-shot of the bias-eyed trooper, he muttered:

"It is an astonishing thing that the chiefs of Ould Ireland are ever ready to come to America and be but common men of the clan—no, I forget, every Irishman expects to get an office in this country, and somehow most of them do.

"Ah! there is Jack coming back to the command, so something is up."

As he dashed rapidly on, he reached the side of Captain Taylor just as Texas Jack did.

"Buffalo Bill's compliments, Captain Taylor, and he begs you to call in your flankers and Surgeon Powell from the rear, and make a rapid dash for the Gap into the valley, as he is sure the Indians are preparing to attack from four quarters in the hills this side of the entrance to the valley, but a run will throw them out of their calculations, and we can put them behind us very quickly."

"All right, Jack."

"Mr. Onderdonk, call in Surgeon Powell and the flankers."

"I will guide, sir, just in range ahead," said Texas Jack, and he rode to the front.

The flankers were at once signaled in, and the signal was also given to "Chafe" O'Hara to call Surgeon Powell up to the command.

He did it with an alacrity that was amusing, and having seen that Surgeon Powell recognized his signal, came on himself to the command with the air of a man who had the words in his mouth:

"Devil take the hindmost."

Surgeon Powell came on at an easy lope, which increased to a gallop, then to a run, as he saw the command start off rapidly in close column.

They had barely gone half a mile when there came a burst of wild yells behind them, and for the first time a band of red-skins showed themselves.

"A hundred of them in our rear, mounted and in hot pursuit," said Captain Taylor as he glanced behind him when one of Powell's war-cries had attracted his attention.

CHAPTER LXII.

A FLYING FIGHT.

THE two Englishmen were aglow with excitement.

They loved danger for the stirring it gave their hearts and pulses.

They had fought in many a battle, but never one like this.

The East Indian, the African, the Bush Rangers of New Zealand were savages, but not the dangerous foes that the American Indian is.

Now they had a chance to see what the red-skin was in battle, why the American Government was compelled to keep a large military force upon the frontier, to keep back the red-skins, whom a few fanatics believed in conquering with a Bible in one hand and a string of beads in the other.

They had read criticisms time and again, of the "Indian policy" of the United States, the country of officers and soldiers, and now they were to behold what kind of foes they had to deal with.

With no hostile intent they, the soldiers as their escort, were going upon a mission upon the boundary of the Indian country.

That they could not mean attack, the smallness of their force would indicate.

And yet they had been discovered, dogged, and were to be surrounded and put to death if it could be done.

Back near the fort was Skeleton Gap where innocent emigrants had been butchered, and ahead of them was Massacre Valley, where a settlement had been destroyed, and perhaps one of their own kinsmen had been cruelly put to death.

Were the army officers they had met, the scouts and the soldiers, daring to a fault, generous-hearted and chivalric, men who would butcher a red-skin from love of killing?

Perish the thought!

They were men who would do their duty, and held regret that the Indians forced them to slay and destroy.

And yet the fanatics, the Indian-lovers, would save and denounce the soldiers, thinking the life of one Indian should be saved at the sacrifice of half a dozen lives of brave soldiers.

Such thoughts crowded upon the two Englishmen as they dashed along with their escort, and they felt keenly the attack made upon American soldiers, as also upon the English in India and Africa.

Suddenly glancing back they saw Surgeon Powell halt, whirl his horse to face the Indians and raise his rifle.

There, just coming out of the timber were a band of mounted warriors, spurring on and yelling like mad.

A shower of arrows went flying toward the scout as he halted, but fell short.

But not so the bullets he sent flying back into the crowd of red horsemen.

A chief fell, a horse went down, a warrior and several ponies, as the sixteen shots of the repeating rifle went flying into their midst.

"Surgeon Powell has opened the ball," cried Captain Taylor, and the men burst forth in a cheer as Lord Lonsfield answered:

"Yes, and in most deadly manner."

On flew the command, on came Powell once more, and the crowd behind him.

Texas Jack had gone to the front again, Buffalo Bill had dropped back within sight of the soldiers, and the two were together.

Suddenly they halted, and their rifles went up to their shoulders.

It was merry, though deadly music for a minute, as the two repeating rifles rung out in a duet together, and the result was at once noted, for out of a clump of timber ahead, dashed half a hundred Indians, breaking upon either side, and too rapidly to carry their dead with them.

"That reveals their force," cried Captain Taylor.

"How so, may I ask, captain?"

"They had a hundred braves in our rear, and that was their strongest force; now fifty show up in our front, and we may be sure that about the same number, no more, perhaps less, are on our flanks."

"This would make, say about two hundred and fifty warriors."

"Yes, Lord Lonsfield."

"And we are just over thirty all told," Sir John remarked.

"I have fought far greater odds, gentlemen, under far more adverse circumstances," was Captain Taylor's reassuring response.

A minute or two more and they passed through the timber which the terrible fire of Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack had driven the Indians from.

"No wonder they ran," said Sir John, as they rode over several dead bodies of braves and ponies.

And on they swept, now in the open country before reaching the Gap into the valley.

As the fire of the scouts had scattered the band in front upon either flank, it now became a race for the heavily timbered Gap, and the red-skins felt that they had been cleverly out-manuevered.

They now only had to pursue, with no force in front to head off the soldiers at the Gap.

As the country was now open, the scouts allowed the command to catch up, while Frank Powell closed up from the rear, and all were *en masse* once more.

"Bravo, Powell, you gave them a lesson," cried Captain Taylor, while he said to the scouts:

"And you, Bill, and Jack, chased the hornets from our trail."

"It is a flying fight now."

"Yes, captain, they will consolidate and push us for all we are worth."

"We must out-run them well, so as to turn and get position to make a stand of it."

"And if they crowd us too close?"

"Then push on for the mound of Old Trapper Dennis in Massacre Valley," was the reply of Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE TRAPPER'S MOUND.

THE Gap was ahead, and the party felt assured of reaching it and having time to take positions and turn upon their foes.

"I told you so, my lord," said Captain Taylor, pointing behind them as the Indians now all came in view, stretched out in a straggling column of pursuit.

"I make them about the number you said, Captain Taylor—two hundred and fifty."

"Yes, and they are all I hope within signal," answered Surgeon Powell.

"Captain Taylor, we are nearing the Gap now, sir, and with your kind permission I would like to make a suggestion."

"Certainly, Cody."

"It is a ride for life now, but when we reach the Gap, would it not be well, sir, to allow me to go on ahead, with Surgeon Powell and say eight troopers, so as to reach the point I have in view and prepare for your coming and a stand-off of the Indians—"

"The very thing, so you can keep right on, while we halt; and Surgeon Powell, will you take eight men with you and go with Cody?"

"Yes, Captain Taylor, and Bill's suggestion is a good one, for of course he intends to make for the Old Trapper's Mound."

"You know the spot?"

"Well, and there is no better place to stand a siege in than there."

"Bill was confined there with Trapper Dennis when I passed him in the valley."

"All right, as soon as we get out of view behind the timber, keep right on with Cody and your men."

This being decided upon the men were detailed, and the command was ordered to wheel and open fire, before reaching the Gap, so as to check the Indians who were crowding, or at least the leaders were.

At a command from the captain, every man having been warned of what was coming, the troops wheeled to the right-about into line, the scouts and the two Englishmen upon the left, and there was a quick, sudden volley poured into the advancing red-skins.

It was a surprise to them, for they had not expected it.

It was a set-back, too, and a deadly one, for the well-trained cavalymen had not fired a shot to throw away.

The rattle of the Spencer carbines and repeating-rifles was incessant for a minute of time, and then as suddenly the flight was continued.

That the Indians were checked very decidedly showed plainly from the dead and wounded warriors and horses piled in a heap upon the ground.

"We gained all of five minutes by that volley," said Captain Taylor, as they flew on once more.

The Gap was soon reached, and the cavalymen deployed into line, dismounted to rest their horses, and stood behind trees awaiting a charge.

Buffalo Bill and his party went on at the same speed, though their going was hidden by the timber from the eyes of the Indians.

On swept the scout, and with him the pack-animals, pushed rapidly on by Chips and Crow, who were now beginning to wish that they had remained at the fort.

"We was a leetle too previous, Crow, ter wish ter come on this fool expedition," said Chips.

"Yas, but I didn't think thar was ter be no foolishness with red Injuns."

"I thought there was big money in it, too."

"Yas, and maybe there's a couple o' nigger funerals," was the disconsolate response.

Through the Gap they swept, and then into the valley.

Down it they went, past a ruined house of an unfortunate settler here and there, and which caused Chips and Crow to look bluer and bluer as they rode on.

Before them in the distance loomed up what was known as Trapper's Mound.

"We can stand off a tribe of red-skins there, Bill."

"Yes, Doc, if besieged; but we can make those fellows let us alone, if more do not come."

"And if more do come?"

"Well, I'll have to light out in some way for the fort for aid."

"I hope it won't be so bad as that, Bill."

"I trust not; but here we are."

The mound was before them now, rising like a huge sugarloaf in the valley, to a height of a hundred feet or more.

Its sides were steep and rugged, and its summit an open center an acre or more in size, and with trees growing up, in and around it.

Springs were in the center, forming a pond, which, overflowing, trickled down the steep side into the stream wandering through the valley.

The way they had come there was a mountain range of ordinary height, while upon the other side of the valley the mountains towered far upward and were bold, rugged to impassability, and heavily clad with trees of massive size.

The soldiers seemed delighted at the point to be chosen in which to make a stand, and so commented to each other upon its advantages.

There was a trail leading upward, where wild beasts had gone to make their lair in the top, and up this the party rode, now going at a walk.

"Post the men, doctor, while I look after the horses," said Buffalo Bill, as they went over the edge into the basin-like top of the Trapper's Mound.

CHAPTER LXIV.

BESIEGED.

THE party left in the Gap had a good chance to take position, and the horses to rest, before the Indians began to press them.

They had met with three rebuffs, from Surgeon Powell, the two scouts, and the all-round volley.

These had thinned their numbers by a dozen dead and twice as many wounded, and horses also.

Now they were anxious to make a rush in a mass, break into the timber and have their foes at their mercy.

The chiefs made their calculations, and explained them to the braves.

They had counted their foes, and found them all told thirty-five in number, for they counted in Chips and Crow also.

These would give them as many rifles, thrice as many revolvers, a number of swords, horses, saddles, bridles and some food and provender.

They had two hundred and odd braves, and in fact six to one.

In the charge they must expect to lose a warrior killed for every soldier, and perhaps as many more wounded; but look at the gain to be derived by those who were not killed, not to speak of the thirty-five scalps, for they still counted in Chips and Crow's scalps, though how they would have gotten them, if they killed the two negroes, would have been a puzzle for the whole tribe.

Listening to such arguments from their chiefs the braves decided to make the charge and wipe out their foes.

But there was one thing which was forgotten, as is always the case.

The chiefs made a bad break in forgetting the fact, too.

This was that the soldiers had seven-shot carbines, the officers, Texas Jack and the two Englishmen repeating rifles, carrying sixteen shots.

By this slight mistake on the part of their leaders, the braves were knocked out of the saddle in a style that would have decimated a regiment, had it held on in the charge.

The fire not ceasing after a volley, and the fact being suddenly recalled that Indian-fighters were dangerous at close range with revolvers, the Indians fell back with wonderful unanimity of purpose, yet carried with them their dead and wounded.

"Come, now for the Trapper's Mound before they rally," said Captain Taylor, and at once the troopers were in the saddle, not a man more than slightly wounded, and when the smoke lifted in the Gap, the red-skins found their enemy gone.

They at once wanted to follow, but with less speed than before, and there were at least fifty warriors who had been taken out of the useful list by death, wounds and those who had to care for the wounded.

They followed, the last named, more leisurely, for there were some who would do to make a show of force when next the whites made a stand.

The valley reached, the Trapper's Mound in the distance came into view, and all saw the wisdom of Buffalo Bill's choice at a glance.

"The very spot," said Captain Taylor.

"Could ask no better," Lord Lonsfield returned.

"If there is water," suggested Sir John.

"There is water, for Cody is not one to be caught where he cannot get it," remarked Lieutenant Onderdonk.

"I see Powell on the top," said Captain Taylor as they drew nearer.

"Yes, and Cody."

"Their men are dismounted and in position."

"And we have half a mile lead of the Indians."

"Then we'll push harder, for we will need to get into position ourselves," and Captain Taylor led on at greater speed.

Up the hillside they dashed, greeted by a cheer from their comrades already there, and while half a dozen men were left to look after the horses the others dismounted and ran to points of vantage, pointed out to them by Surgeon Powell.

Chips and Crow had regained their nerve, when they saw their position to fight from, had built fires, and unpacked the saddles for provisions, and tents and blankets.

They were cooking dinner when the reinforcements arrived, and were glad that their duties called them around the fire and not to fire.

"It will be hotter up yonder than down here," said Chips, pointing to the soldiers in position around the edge of the basin.

"Yes, it is a deuced place for me," Crow rejoined sentimentally.

The soldiers were half of a halt and rest. They each had a lot of work of rocks, and could command beyond the base of the mound with their rifles.

They would be well protected, and save their horses feeding in the basin, stripped of

saddles and bridles, and with plenty of water near, and grass enough to last their force a week at least.

"We is after being all right, sergeant; but Lord help them two poor nagurs when them Injun arrers gits to flying over in the basin," said Mr. O'Hara.

Had Chips and Crow overheard his remark they would have stampeded.

"Yes, they must go up in the little canyon yonder, with their fire, when the battle begins, but if we disturb them now we'll go short of a dinner," answered the sergeant.

"St. Patrick forbid," was O'Hara's pious ejaculation.

CHAPTER LXV.

A DEADLY HINT.

THAT they were besieged in Trapper's Mound, there was no doubt, for seeing the position chosen, and knowing their inability to carry it by storm, with their numbers, the Indians at once pressed to headquarters camp beyond range, left their dead, wounded and those who were to care for them and prepare food for them in the field, and moved out in two columns to surround the mound.

It was well and skillfully done, and the Englishmen particularly enjoyed the sight of the maneuvers of the red-skin regiment.

They moved up at a slow walk, eight and ten abreast, and dropping warriors as they made the circle, every ten or twenty feet.

Then they stretched out entirely around the mound until the two columns met.

Having done this they could gauge the closeness of their line, and using two hundred braves, at twenty feet apart they were enabled to thus complete the line.

Of course this formed a complete chain around the mound, and having gotten into position the warriors dismounted, staked out their ponies, spread their blankets and sat down upon them to smoke, and watch their foes.

To the surprise of the Englishmen not a shot was fired upon them and Sir John wondering why asked the reason.

"There is not a man in that circle of braves whom Surgeon Powell, Buffalo Bill or Texas Jack could not kill with the rifles they carry, from any point on this hill, Sir John, while the carbines of our men will throw a bullet as far, though perhaps not to do any damage."

"Your rifle, Lord Lonsfield's, Onderdonk's, my own, and those which I gave the sergeant and corporal to bring along will also kill at that distance."

"Before night, about sunset, we will use our long-range rifles to give them a hint to move further off, and it will be a deadly hint, too, and they will widen their circle, while we will give Powell, Cody and Jack a chance to scout around the base of the mound after dark, and thus give us warning of a night attack, when we will have fires ready to light around the basin, and thus show up the sides of the hill."

"The men can thus sleep until aroused, all night if not, and we three protectors can take to-morrow to rest, if the red-skins do not get sick of their undertaking before that time."

"Well, this fighting Indians is peculiar work, and has to be reduced to a nicety," said Sir John.

"Yes, and you and Lord Lonsfield can get your chance to kill your first Indian, when we give them the hint we spoke of."

"And we can see if we hit or miss, too."

"Oh, yes; but you must not miss, for you know the old saying that every dead Indian is a good Indian; but come, Chips has dinner ready, and we are ready for dinner."

The dinner was greatly enjoyed, and when over, the officers, Englishmen and scouts took sentinel duty while the men ate.

When the troopers had again taken position, Captain Taylor called a council of men, at which the three cavalry officers, the two Englishmen and the scouts were present.

Talking over the situation, no fear was entertained but that they could readily head off the red skins, day or night, if attacked; but the question was advanced by Surgeon Powell:

"What if they have already sent for reinforcements, and in a few days are backed by a very large force?"

"Then I will run the gantlet to the fort for aid," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, we can move out as though to cut through, make a feint, and Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack can make a dash at different points to go through, for with Surgeon Powell as scout we will not be left in the lurch."

When the sun was about to disappear behind the mountain range, Captain Taylor called those who had repeating-rifles to take position to give the Indians a hint that their circle was too contracted.

They were stationed at given points, and were to fire at a given signal on the bugle, Lieutenant Onderdonk, who was a fine cornet player, acting as bugler.

At last the signal came, and the rifles, eight in number, flashed together, followed a second after by Lieutenant Onderdonk's shot, for dropping the bugle he had seized his weapon and caught his man on the jump.

"Not a shot thrown away!"

"See how they make tracks to widen the circle," cried Captain Taylor, and he called out:

"Do not fire again, for there is no need of killing a flying man."

Not another shot was fired, and Surgeon Powell said:

"You and Sir John killed your man, Lord Lonsfield."

"Yes, and with no danger to ourselves," said the nobleman.

"Your danger will come later," was the significant reply of the Surgeon Scout.

CHAPTER LXVI.

BUFFALO BILL'S SIGNAL.

At nightfall Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell and Texas Jack went out to take position below the base of the hill and report any advance in time to meet it.

Thus the night had passed until a couple of hours after midnight, when suddenly Buffalo Bill appeared in the basin and announced:

"They are coming."

A moment after Surgeon Powell arrived from another point with the same report, and Texas Jack appeared in a few seconds more.

Soldiers were placed to light the fires, and then all waited in silence for the signal to fire, which would be when any one first sighted an Indian.

At last the suspense was broken by the report of two rifles almost together. They were fired by Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, and their war-cries followed, with that of Texas Jack and his shot also.

The fires were at once set ablaze, and in an instant the rifles of the officers and Englishmen, and the carbines of the soldiers were cracking rapidly.

Where they had expected to surprise, the Indians were in their turn completely surprised.

They staggered back, rallied, then, as the fire-lights put them in full view, rushed back down the hill, leaving many of their dead behind them.

"Put out the fires!" came the orders, and the fagots were scattered, to be used again.

The morning dawned, with the three scouts still on duty outside, and coming in at daylight Buffalo Bill reported that reinforcements had arrived for the red-skins during the night.

At breakfast he said:

"They had sent for them yesterday, but hoped to wipe us out before the other warriors arrived."

"Now they have a force of fully five hundred."

"Then we had best make a feint, and you and Jack make a break through the lines."

"Yes, captain, I am ready."

"And I am the same!" put in Texas Jack.

But, the Indian reinforcements, before out of sight, now came into view, and joined the cordon still around the mound.

"Whew! There are more than I thought," declared Captain Taylor.

"You can never break through that line, Bill."

"It looks so, captain."

"Then we are besieged, and that is all there is to it."

"I can make up as an Indian, captain,

talk their language perfectly, as you know; and as I brought in some clothes I took off a dead red-skin, to-night I'll go through on foot," said Surgeon Powell.

"Hold on!" suddenly cried Buffalo Bill. "I speak Injun, too, and can play red-skin away up in G, so I'll try the same game, for one of us may get killed; but I have another caper."

"What is it, Bill?"

"You remember old Trapper Dennis?"

"Yes."

"I told you of the whopper he told me, about signaling, and a man, or ghost coming and scaring of the Indians?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is the old tree, as you observe, standing like a flag-pole, so I will climb it and set the United States Flag on the top."

"It will do no harm; and it may do good, if Trapper Dennis is not an immaculate liar."

Having come to this decision, it did not take the scout-chief long to carry it out.

Up to the top of the tree he climbed, the flag wrapped about his waist, and fluttering behind like a tail.

The encircling Indians sprung from their blankets at the sight, for they could not understand it.

But, when Buffalo Bill made the flag-signal fast upon the lightning-riven top of the tree, the wary savages surrounding the mound never for one moment thought it was a signal for help.

There fluttered the flag in the breeze, all day long, and when night came there was no sign that their signal had been seen or would be answered, as Trapper Dennis had promised.

So Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell shaved clean, painted their faces and donning the rig of the dead Indians, bade farewell to their comrades, for whom they were taking such risks, and crept away in the darkness on their perilous journey.

Surgeon Powell walked boldly along in a circling direction, as though an Indian on the rounds, for he had the dress of a chief, as Buffalo Bill had also, and soon came in sight of the line.

He was glad to see that it had been thinned to a sentinel line at night only, and with a word to a warrior on his blanket, about being wounded in the foot, he mounted the horse of the brave and coolly rode away.

At the timber belt, toward the lofty mountain range, was the camp of the wounded, and he rode within the circle of the camp-fires' light without a challenge, or a suspicion was cast upon him that he was not a red-skin.

Once clear of the Indian lines, and hoping that Buffalo Bill had gotten through also, Surgeon Powell started off in a canter down the valley to make the quickest way to the fort.

He was glad to see that the horse he had gotten by such a lucky accident was a very good one, and fresh.

"I will push him for all he is worth," he muttered, and the animal was kept at a steady canter for hours.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A MAN OF MYSTERY.

BUFFALO BILL, when leaving the mound, played the same tactics as Surgeon Powell had used.

He circled toward the line, and when he saw a red-skin sentinel near to him he called to him to come to him as he was wounded.

"The Gray Eagle was scouting, and was shot with an arrow," he said, in his choicest Sioux.

Whether the sentinel knew the Gray Eagle or not, he believed the story, for he came and bent over the scout, as he was lying on the ground.

The Indian made a mistake, and when he realized the fact it was too late to help it.

He found himself in a grip like a grizzly's and when Buffalo Bill arose the Indian was dead.

Taking him in his arms he bore him to his horse feeding near, put him across his back and started for the timber.

He had made up his mind to say that his brother had been killed while on the sentinel line.

But he did not meet any one to offer an

explanation to and finding that no red-skins barred his way, he led the horse rapidly on to a spot where he could conceal the body.

This done he was about to ride on when he heard a voice say:

"Who is my red brother, the chief?"

The language was the Sioux, but the deep voice, the speaking of his "red brother," convinced Buffalo Bill that the speaker was a white man.

"I am a chief of the Sioux," he answered.

"So I know, and I asked your name. I am the Spirit Chief of the mountain and valley."

"Do you know me now?"

But Buffalo Bill had heard of a white man dwelling in the mountains, who had wondrous influence with the Sioux, their medicine-men and great chiefs seeking him for advice.

But he knew of no white man who had ever seen the Mysterious Hermit or White Spirit Chief, as he was called, unless it was Trapper Dennis, for he must be the one who had gone to his aid.

So he answered in English:

"I set a signal on the mound in the valley."

"Did you come here to answer it?"

"Ah! you are no Indian?"

"I am not," and Buffalo Bill had his revolver ready.

"You are not Trapper Dennis?"

"No, but I am one whom Trapper Dennis told how you—for I feel that it was you—saved him from the red-skins."

"I set that signal to-day, as Trapper Dennis told me to do."

"You had faith, and it has been rewarded. I am here to answer it. Who are you?"

"Buffalo Bill, men call me, and guide and scout to a party of besieged soldiers in the mound. I dressed up as an Indian to escape and go to the fort for aid, and met you."

"No need of going, for I will aid you."

"I know you well, Buffalo Bill, and the Indians fear you as they do an evil spirit."

"But, can you aid me and my comrades?"

"I will show you. Go out of the danger line here, and at sunrise return and you will not find a red-skin in the valley."

"If I could only believe you, old gentleman."

"See here, Buffalo Bill, I am a man who never intentionally told a lie. I am not a renegade, for I do not dwell among the Indians, though I have done so."

"I am as free as the air, and hold a power over them that they dare not disobey."

"Who are you?"

"Nameless and unknown. A man who has come to their wilds to spend the remainder of his days. A man who long ago left the world, and is ready to die when his time comes. Will you believe me?"

"Yes; but you say that you have lived among the Indians?"

"I did so, for years."

"The Sioux?"

"Yes; they named me the White Spirit of the Mountains."

"Will you answer me a question?"

"Yes."

"Have they any prisoners?"

"White, you mean?"

"Yes."

"They had."

"But have none now?"

"No; all are dead."

"Did they have a man prisoner whose name was Granger Goldhurst?"

"They had," was the reply, after a moment of hesitation, as though he sought to recall the name.

"And is he dead?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me aught of him, for Lord Lonsfield is with the soldiers now, he and Sir John Reeder, and they came here to find him, dead or alive, or some one of his family."

"His family were massacred in the valley here, at their home; he was taken prisoner, and after a few years died."

"You know this?"

"I knew him well, for I was with him when he gave up his life."

"See here! I wear on my finger a ring which he gave me, so take it to your English friends as proof of his death."

"Where is he buried?"

"He was buried in the mountains."

"Could you find his grave?"

"No, not now; but I have here another memento of him, his wallet, with his will in it, and I have never parted with it."

"That is certain proof, so take that to your English friends along with the ring."

"I have much to thank you for, sir, and I hope we may meet again, for you will go with me to the camp."

"No, I shun all men now. We shall not meet again. Wait here, and when the sun rises return to your camp, for then there will not be a red-skin in the valley. Good-by, Buffalo Bill."

"With this the man strode away in the darkness, and left the scout to meditate upon his strange adventure."

He however trusted the strange man, and waiting until dawn, started back toward the camp.

At last the valley was before him, and not an Indian was in sight!

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE FINALE.

ON toward the mound rode Buffalo Bill, and as he did so he beheld his comrades watching his coming.

They of course supposed him to be an Indian, but as he came alone no one offered to shoot.

"That's Buffalo Bill! He and Surgeon Powell have run every red-skin out of the valley," cried Texas Jack.

All greeted him with a cheer as he came nearer, and then they heard his very strange story of the remarkable man, he had met in the timber.

"Old Trapper Dennis was right after all, for the signal fetched him and no mistake," averred Buffalo Bill.

Those in the basin explained how Texas Jack, acting as scout, had reported the Indians moving before day, though for what purpose was not known.

Then came the query as to where Surgeon Powell was?

No one could answer the question; but it was certain every red-skin had gone.

Taking Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder aside, with Captain Taylor, Buffalo Bill told them just what he had asked the strange man about Granger Goldhurst, and his answers.

He then handed over the ring and the wallet, and after glancing at them, both gentlemen asserted that they knew the ring well, and the wallet had the name of Granger Goldhurst upon it in gilt letters much worn.

Within were some papers and letters, and the will of the lost heir, leaving his property in England to his nearest of kin, but making no reference to any wealth in America.

At the end of the will was written:

"I married in America, and had one child, but wife and child were massacred at my frontier home, and my death ends my race."

"What gold I had hidden away was taken also, and what little I have in England is disposed of as above in my will."

"(Signed), GRANGER GOLDHURST."

"We need no further proof, for this is poor Granger's writing," said Lord Lonsfield, and both he and Sir John Reeder were deeply affected.

Though there was no reason for longer stay in the valley, they desired at least to go to the ruins of their kinsman's home, and Buffalo Bill guided the party thither.

"I will have a monument carved and placed here," said Lord Lonsfield, and then mounting their horses the party started upon the return trail, for all felt the deepest anxiety about Surgeon Powell.

The next morning, as they were breaking camp, Buffalo Bill gave a loud shout that brought every man to his feet.

"Voila!" cried Captain Taylor, while a score of voices shouted:

"The Surgeon Scout!"

It was indeed Frank Powell, riding far ahead of a large force of cavalry which he was keeping up to a great speed.

At their head was Major Sidway, and in the rear of the three hundred troopers came two pieces of a light battery.

They had come for a fight, they said, and they meant it.

Explanations soon followed, and it was shown that Surgeon Powell had ridden his horse to death, and meeting a courier whose

dispatches were not so important, he had taken his horse and gone on to the fort, leaving the man to walk back until he sent him a mount.

The getting of the "Fifth" into the saddle with two light guns was but a few minutes' work, and as Major Sidway said:

"He kept us on the jump all the way; but thank God we found you all safe."

And back on the trail went the forces to the fort, where they were received with the wildest of cheers that the besieged troopers had been saved.

CHAPTER LXIX.

CONCLUSION.

UPON the return to the fort Buffalo Bill was most surprised, perhaps more so than the others, to learn that in the short while they had been away changes had happened wholly unexpected.

In the first place, Captain Diaz and the King of the Rope had left for Mexico, it was said, and Miss Bond and Bessie had accompanied them. The maiden had told Madge, who was the last one she saw, that she was going to become the wife of the Mexican captain, so would no more be seen at Fort Beauvoir.

Then, too, Don Eduardo had also gone, and it was said, from a hint he gave, to be "best man" for his friend, Captain Leon Diaz, when he led the Belle of the Border to the altar.

"I shall always believe that there was something wrong about those people," said Buffalo Bill to Madge.

"And so will I, especially as Emerald Ed bought the Ranch Isle and all its cattle," she replied.

"Is that so?"

"It is, and Emerald Ed is now seen by daylight, Bill, though Keno Kate never appears, it is said, except in the saloon of the Devil's Acre, for the Bonds, you must know, departed the very day after you left on your Blind Trail."

"I half believe that they knew you were a detective upon them, Miss Madge, so got frightened and ran off."

"Maybe that is the reason," confessed Madge with laughter.

After their return from the Blind Trail, Colonel Loyal gave the two Englishmen a grand ball in Social Hall, after which they departed for the East to return to England, but promised to come back some day for another good time on the frontier of America, and Lord Lonsfield said that he would send a monument from New York, which Buffalo Bill was to have put up over the ruins of Granger Goldhurst's border home.

And the nobleman kept his word.

And what of Mustang Madge?

I need now only remark that she at last married one of the gallant Fifth, and that one was the lucky Otey Onderdonk, who was the envy of every young officer in the fort, for in the unknown Daughter of the Regiment, the Prairie Waif, he secured a pearl beyond price.

THE END.

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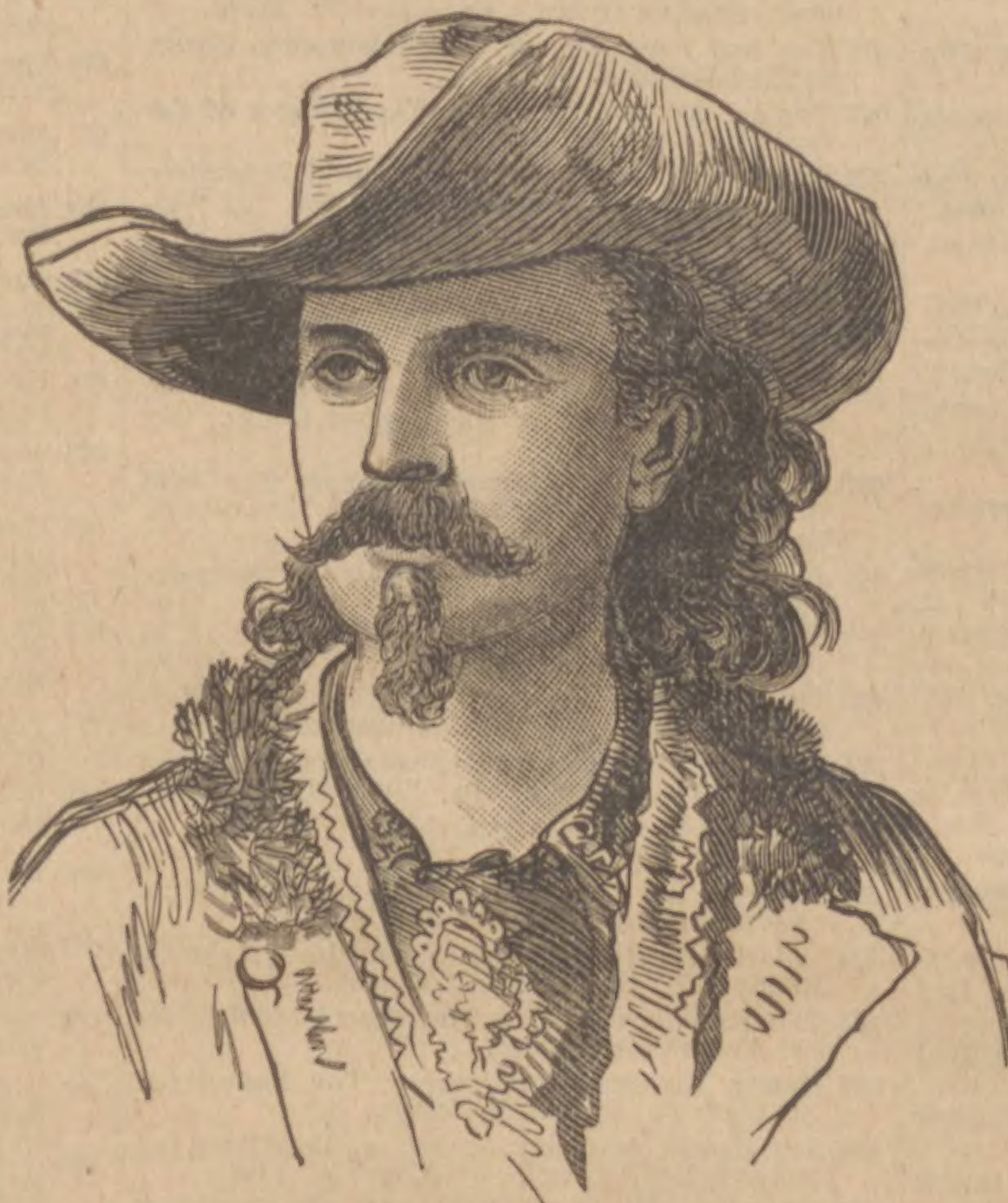
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